



THEATRICALS

SECOND SERIES



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THE ALBUM THE REPROBATE

BY

HENRY JAMES

II

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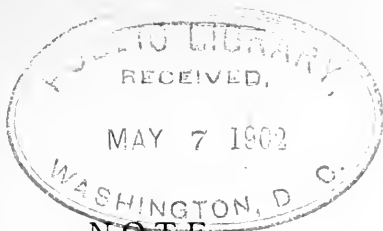
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NOTE

ONE may have a lively general mistrust of the preface to a work of fiction and the explanation of a work of art, and yet recognise that an unacted play stands in a certain need of introduction. A play is normally introduced the night it is performed, and if it has not been performed at all the conditions there was a question of its meeting remain inconveniently obscure. These conditions have been those very personal factors a manager and his company. Of a published play, however, it cannot exactly be said that it has not been performed at all; for the disconcerted author at least—if, as he has wrought, the thing has arrived at adequate vividness—the printed book itself grows mildly theatrical, the frustrated effort approximately positive. Anything he may make use of his margin to superadd becomes therefore simply a substitute for the representation originally aimed at, the particular representation which, in its meagreness or its merit, would, for better or worse, have spoken for itself. In just the degree indeed in which his confidence had been qualified by that prospect, in just that degree may the naked text of the piece, dragged ashore only to stand shivering, appear

to him to plead for some argued equivalent of the merciful curtain that was never either to rise or to fall.

Of both of these little experiments in theatrical brevity it is as true as of a pair of others lately preceding them¹ that if they had not been conceived in a given emergency they would never have been conceived at all. Their brevity was what the occasion demanded, and there were pressing reasons why the author should fix his eyes on lively simplicity and deadly directness. If it was an hour for doing anything at all it was an hour for doing something elaborately plain. Again, of course, as with the other pieces to which I have alluded, the question, in the face of over-estimated chances, ultimately came up of whether the dread of supersubtlety had not weighed too much. It is a question that matters little now, but let none of the more, or even of the less, initiated blame him for this fine scruple, or rather for this overmastering terror, in any case in which such a censor may not personally have learnt the lesson of that bitter humiliation, that unrecorded anguish of the novice, the inexorable, the managerial "cut." Into the soul of this particular novice, nourished in the faith that brevity is intelligible only when organic, that iron had entered deep, and the consequent desire to make in advance, in a new hazard, every sacrifice that might propitiate the god was naturally not a stranger to this anxious cultivation of limits. The greater danger is really doubtless that when one is under such a discipline one may, in one's trepidation, transport the cultivation of limits too much to the

¹ "Theatricals: Two Comedies. 1894."

plane of subject. To treat a "big" subject in the intensely summarised fashion demanded by an evening's traffic of the stage when the evening, freely clipped at each end, is reduced to two hours and a half, is a feat of which the difficulty looms large to a writer accustomed to tell his story in another form. The only writer who can regard, and can treat, such a difficulty as small is the writer whose early practice as well as his later has been in the theatrical strait-jacket.

Let me not indeed speak of the difficulty of meeting the requirements of the stage as if for a writer, of whatever antecedents, having any business at all *dans cette galère* it could be anything less than a fascination. I know not whether for the effective playwright the fascination be less than for the perverted man of letters freshly trying his hand at an art of which, in opposition to his familiar art, every rule is an infraction, every luxury a privation and every privilege a forfeiture, so that he has if possible even more to unlearn than to learn: certain it is such a desperate adventurer promptly perceives that if the job were easy it would not be worth undertaking. It has need at every step of the dignity of its difficulty, and its difficulty, at every step, is of a sort that the innumerable undismayed are destined complacently never to discover. One's first practical demonstrations of this attachment have inevitably something of the quality of the "exercise," a statement particularly exact when they have not been happy to the end, that end, I mean, of which the beginning is the tuning of the fiddles. On the one hand, doubtless, one should not publish one's exercises; yet on the other it is the

very fact of publication that is required so to label them. If the unacted play, in England, be not quite hopelessly unacted till it is printed, so this sealing of its doom constitutes precisely the ground for an obituary notice.

Any composition, for that matter, is an exercise when there has been in connection with it a meek and lowly review of the right ways to keep on the right side of a body of people collected together at a particular hour and having paid money—really a good round sum—to be amused. This speculative study of what the public, as the phrase is, may in the good-humour of that ferocious love of a bargain by which it is so healthily animated possibly “like,” gives the taint of the perfunctory even to the cleverest play—and still more of course to any that is not the cleverest. The author’s tact goes above all to feeling for the particular pound of flesh that the Shylock of the box-office may happen for the hour to pronounce best weight; considerations coloured equally by the circumstances imposed, the circumstances in which the author exerts himself. Those under which both the entertainments comprised in this volume were projected, and under which the first was partly and the second fully elucubrated, carried with them a particular economy of production. This is indeed more or less the prospect which every dramatist has to face; the situation differs, however, with the rigour of the economy—a term I am far from applying in any invidious sense. In other words the question immediately comes up of the amount of interpretation a piece may depend on receiving, a question the answer to which can hardly fail to regulate the experiment from

the germ. These things—the formula prescribed, the adjustments required, the direction imposed, the quantity of acting supplied—are, taken together, the star under which it is born.

It may help at any rate to account for what would otherwise be inexplicable in “The Album” and “The Reprobate” to say that the act of propitiation on their behalf seemed most securely to lie in the uttermost regions of dramatic amiability, the bland air of the little domestic fairy-tale, a species of which we had recently enough welcomed, with wonderment and envy, sundry successful specimens. It became perforce a part of that fascination of which I spoke just now (in connection with the question of difficulty) to try and

“see with eye serene
The very pulse of the machine,”

discover in other words the secret, master the specific type. The different fairies had to be summoned to the cradle, from the fairy Genial to the fairy Coincidence, and one was not to feel the omens propitious till the scheme bristled with as many of these old friends as a nursery-tale. And yet the nursery-tale had to be rigorously a comedy—unless it should have the good fortune to prove rigorously a farce. If indeed it should find itself striking for freedom in that quarter it would encounter on the path, with warning finger raised, the incorruptible fairy Sentiment. The fairy Sentiment in turn had to mind what she was about under the eye of the foul fiend Excision, “the blind Fury with th’ abhorred shears,” from under whose feet every inch of ground

was if possible to be cut in advance. Then the mixture was to be stirred to the tune of perpetual motion and served, under pain of being rejected with disgust, with the time-honoured bread-sauce of the happy ending. Perpetual motion would be the tide floating the boat off the sands of the superficial, and the happy ending, staring out of the funny round eyes of the type itself, was as much designated as a necessity as it was supposedly little foreseen as a result. Add to this that, as a door must be either open or shut and a play be either one thing or the other, conformity to the tone of the particular variety had to be kept well in view.

Authors, I fancy, differ on the point greatly from managers, but it is difficult to enter into the ethics of an author who is not clear about the duty resting on a drama, large or small, to make up its mind about itself and decide definitely what it shall pretend to pass for. A comedy only, and nothing else but a comedy, *is* a comedy; likewise, as it can only arrive at its distinguishing form if the idea at its root be a comedy-idea, so the possession of this idea commits it from the first to the responsibility of congruity. It must be pitched in the key of its nature—for its nature has a key. If it forfeits its harmony with its type it forfeits everything. But that is all rudimentary. Last not least these compositions were to have met the pressure of easy and early production. In the case of "The Reprobate" this requirement was particularly operative, and the whole experiment was intensely submissive to it. I hasten to parenthesise, in connection with the title of the piece, which recalls so nearly that of a con-

spicuous contemporary drama, that I have ventured to retain it because it is worn in the first place by a thing of mere drollery—so far as the miscarried intention goes, and in the second by a thing unacted. If the play had been performed it would certainly have been performed under a name less usurped. The author of "The Profligate," as the case stands, will view with indulgence an usurpation of so little practical import. The convenience the piece had to square with was the idea of a short comedy, the broader the better, thoroughly simple, intensely "pleasant," affording a liberal chance to a young sympathetic comedian, calling for as little acting as possible besides, skirting the fairy-tale, straining any and every point for that agreeable falsity, entailing no expense in mounting, and supremely susceptible of being played to audiences unaccustomed to beat about the bush for their amusement—audiences, to be perfectly honest, in country towns. This last condition was rigorous for both pieces, and the one the author took most into account.

But his calculation to this particular end, as well as to others, proved wide of the mark; which means accordingly that—like their predecessors and like every other dramatic bid made by the neophyte and not taken up—they do, in an intenser degree, practically confess themselves exercises. (It is impossible to doubt, by the way, that if more such rejected addresses were only given to the light, with some history of their adventures, they would end by constituting in themselves a suggestive, almost a legitimate, literature and adding greatly to the lively interest taken, in our day, in the

concerns of the English theatre.) There would be nothing more to say about this volume were it not that the fascination I mentioned above clings almost as much to the theory of the matter as to the practice ; so that in regard to any given collapse it may never be quite idle to glance at the influence that has made the exercise irretrievably hollow. Shall it have been mainly that terror of excision to which I have alluded and which engenders precautions that vitiate a scheme by making it abound, so to speak, in the sense of its meagreness ? The hard meagreness inherent in the theatrical form, committed to think after all so much more of the clock than of the subject—the subject which runs so breathless, so fearfully flogged a race with the galloping dial-hands—this danger of death by starvation tends too much to undermine the faith of the neophyte, tends to make him give up, as lost in advance to his idea, the advantage of development. From such a renunciation to choosing the ideas that require least to be developed is, one must fear, but a short and specious step. The most important ideas, he reflects, are those that require most looking after—the least important are those that require least. “You can’t feed a big stomach,” he says to himself, “on a gobble between trains” ; and the solution accordingly seems to lie in the region of small receptacles. “Give me an hour more, just an hour,” he pleads ; “Dumas and Augier never lacked it, and it makes all the difference ; and with its aid I shan’t fear to tackle the infinite.” He does not get his hour, and he will probably begin by missing his subject. He takes, in his dread of complication, a minor one, and it’s

heavy odds that the minor one, with the habit of small natures, will prove thankless.

The only beauty of this consummation lurks probably in the private generalisation it leads our gentleman to make. Heaven forbid we should too rashly drop in upon his private generalisations : those that have gathered about the kindled fire of our hypothetical inquirer will surely constitute a family party whose secrets it were best not to overhear. They are not prepared for company, they are not dressed to go out, and some of them will certainly startle us in their abandonment of the manners of society. We must give him, however, all the benefit of the presumption that they swarm about his hearth. These are the associations that attach him to the insufferable little art with which he is so justly infatuated : ties of infinite reflection and irritation, relations of lively intimacy and of endless discovery. The consistent pursuit of it comprehends, I think, more private generalisations, more stores of technical experience, than any other æsthetic errand ; and these secret hoards may not unreasonably be expected to supply sooner or later, in most cases, the ringing metal with which the adventurer shall pay his way. It is an expensive journey—it costs ever so much a mile. But the nature of the infatuation, as I have called it, enlivens, if it does not shorten, the road. The man who pretends to the drama has more to learn, in fine, than any other pretender, and his dog's-eared grammar comes at last to have the remarkable peculiarity of seeming a revelation he himself shall have made.

The lesson consists for the most part, as the author of these remarks has somewhere else ventured to express

the matter, in the periodical throwing overboard of the cargo to save the ship. The ship is always in danger—the most successful play has come within an ace of sinking, and the peril recurs every night; so that universal sacrifice is always in the air. The freight, the fittings, the ballast, the passengers, the provisions, the luggage, the crew, the whole thing must inexorably “go,” and the vessel is not in proper trim till she is despoiled of everything that might have appeared to make her worth saving; till the last survivor in the last rag of the rigging has been consigned to the fishes, uttering that shriek of despair which lives on in the playwright’s ear and becomes eventually the sweetest music he knows. The scientific name of this ferocious salvage is selection—selection made perfect, so that effect, the final residuum, shall become intense—intense with that sole intensity which the theatre can produce and for the sake of which much perhaps will be forgiven it. There is no room in a play for the play itself until everything (including the play, the distracted neophyte pantingly ascertains) has been completely eliminated. Then the fun, as the vulgar phrase is, begins. That it will be found to have begun in the present very simplified studies is much more than shall be here predicted; but the moral of my observations is that, if there have been many occasions when it was recognised as fast and furious, these have been conspicuously occasions when the dramatist himself has alone known (as he has doubtless alone cared) why. His privilege, his duty rather, is to cultivate that mystery. His still more distinguishing function, I hasten to add, is of course to bring it about.

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THE ALBUM

IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

SIR RALPH DAMANT, BART.

MARK BERNAL.

TEDDY ASHDOWN.

THE VICAR.

THE FOOTMAN.

GRACE JESMOND.

LADY BASSET.

MAUD VANNECK.

ACT FIRST

The convenient, inhabited hall of a handsome modern country-house, which exhibits several signs of confusion and disarray, as if something has happened to interrupt the regular routine. Up toward the left the passage to the outer hall, the entrance to the house, and also to some of the apartments. Up toward the right the passage to other apartments. Half-way down, to the right, a large French window, open to the garden and park. Corresponding to it, to the left, the door to the library, constituting another entrance to the house.

Lady BASSET enters briskly from the outer hall, in her hat and mantle, dressed for a journey, carrying with her a dressing-bag substantially stuffed. She places it on one of the tables; then hunting about a moment finds a book in another part of the room and, bringing it over, proceeds to pack it into her bag. While she is so engaged TEDDY ASHDOWN enters from the outer hall, in his hat and Inverness cape, likewise carrying a dressing-bag. In his other hand he carries a note in an enclosed envelope. He stops short an instant, watching Lady BASSET.

TEDDY.

Is that the second volume ?

LADY BASSET, serenely packing.

Dear Maud has it. This is the third. You had better take the first.

TEDDY, coming down, putting his bag on another table.

Oh, I've read it !

LADY BASSET.

That doesn't matter—it completes the set.

TEDDY.

But it deprives the house—!

LADY BASSET, her bag in her hand ; now all ready to go.

The house can afford it, and in this upheaval it's an advantage there should be fewer things to lie about.

TEDDY, artless.

To “lie” about?

LADY BASSET.

When confusion reigns I take a line. There's not a creature anywhere—I carry my own luggage.

TEDDY, taking his bag again.

So do I!

LADY BASSET, perceiving the note in his hand.

You also carry the letters?

TEDDY, reading again the superscription.

Till I find the Vicar. (Then handing her the note, quoting.)
“Very urgent”!

LADY BASSET, who has taken the note from him.

Then why *don't* you find the Vicar?

TEDDY, putting down his bag again ; very vague.

I'm looking!

LADY BASSET, preoccupied with the note, which she retains.

Dear Maud has him.

TEDDY, startled, decided.

Then I must find dear Maud.

LADY BASSET.

You won't—one never does. (Turning the note over and round.)
From Mr. Lamb?

TEDDY, assenting.

The solicitor : to be particularly attended to.

LADY BASSET, with unfaltering decision,

I'll attend to it.

TEDDY, surprised.

You'll read it?

LADY BASSET.

When confusion reigns I take a line. (Then having resolutely
opened and reading the note) "Sir Ralph wires arrival—please
see that he's met at Junction." (Struck, thinking.) Sir
Ralph Damant?

TEDDY.

The next of kin—they've sent for him.

LADY BASSET, thoughtful; refolding the note.

The next of kin? I know—unmarried. I'll see that
he's met! (Then determined.) I'll meet him!

TEDDY, still more surprised.

But you go by the other station.

LADY BASSET.

I don't go. I stay.

TEDDY, in suspense.

And dear Maud?

LADY BASSET.

You'll take her off.

TEDDY, eager.

In a moment—if she'll come.

LADY BASSET.

But you'll first take my bag.

TEDDY, with the bag she has again placed on the table.

Take it—?

LADY BASSET.

Back to my room.

TEDDY.

And tell Miss Jesmond?

LADY BASSET.

Miss Jesmond's out. She's heartless.

TEDDY, blank.

Heartless?

LADY BASSET.

With her protector, her patron, dying!

TEDDY, still more blank.

Dying?

LADY BASSET.

If the nearest of kin is sent for.

TEDDY, struck ; rueful.

What a pity *we're* not near !

LADY BASSET.

One is—when one's on the spot. I've been in houses before when the head has been taken ill and the guests have scattered like frightened sheep. But I hold that guests have duties, and I've always remained at my post. (Seeing MAUD VANNECK : enter MAUD VANNECK from the outer hall, dressed also for travelling.) Mr. Bedford's dying !

MAUD, in a waistcoat, with an eye-glass.

Already ?

LADY BASSET.

Before one can turn round. It has taken only a summer night to empty the house.

MAUD.

It seems to me *we* fill it a good deal ! But I've sent the Vicar for my bag.

LADY BASSET.

You go with Mr. Ashdown.

MAUD, after an instant.

And whom do *you* go with ?

TEDDY.

She doesn't go. You and I go together !

LADY BASSET.

I remain—to act.

TEDDY, to MAUD; explaining.

For poor Mr. Bedford—to receive the heir.

MAUD, struck.

Is there an heir?

TEDDY, taking his note with quick compunction back from Lady BASSET.
By the way, he must be met!

MAUD, surprised, ironic.

By her ladyship?

LADY BASSET.

For common decency. There's no one else!

MAUD.

Isn't there Miss Jesmond?

LADY BASSET.

Miss Jesmond doesn't count. A person in her position—a dependent.

TEDDY.

Besides, she's out.

MAUD.

Only at the station—hurrying people off.

LADY BASSET, struck.

The station? (Catching MAUD's arm and in the inadvertence of her discomposure precipitately betraying herself.) Then she'll see him first!

MAUD, with reproachful superiority.

Is it your kind calculation that *I* shall see him last?

TEDDY.

Don't see him at all! Travel with *me*! (Then as the VICAR appears.) Here's your bag!

Enter the VICAR from the outer hall wearing his hat and carrying a lady's dressing-bag.

MAUD.

Take it back! (Seating herself with resolution.) I remain.

TEDDY, seating himself in the same manner.

Then *I* remain.

LADY BASSET, to the VICAR; abrupt, imperative.

Take me to the Junction—it's your duty.

THE VICAR, youngish, bland, blond, flustered.

There isn't a conveyance—everything's out!

MAUD, to Lady BASSET.

If you go there, my dear, *I* go!

TEDDY, to MAUD.

And if you go, I go! (Then to the VICAR, as Lady BASSET turns away with a disconcerted shrug.) You must go—to meet the heir!

THE VICAR.

Sir Ralph? he's coming?

TEDDY.

This moment. (To get rid of him.) Go quick !

LADY BASSET.

Receive him with all the honours.

MAUD, laughing.

Don't mind that—leave the reception to us !

THE VICAR, at a loss, with his bag.

But how shall I get there ?

TEDDY.

Catch a pony—ride !

THE VICAR, with a happy thought.

I'll run !

Exit the VICAR with the bag to the outer hall.

TEDDY, to MAUD, amused.

He has sneaked your bag !

MAUD.

Recover it—take it back to my room.

LADY BASSET.

Do nothing of the sort—take mine.

TEDDY, with Lady BASSET's bag.

I'll take both !

Exit TEDDY to the outer hall.

MAUD, with dignity and resentment.

That's not the sort of girl I am !

LADY BASSET.

What sort do you mean ?

MAUD.

The sort that goes up to London with unscrupulous young men. You interpret strangely your pledge to my absent mother.

LADY BASSET.

You talk as if your absent mother were in paradise !

MAUD.

She's only at Zanzibar, I know—on her tour round the globe. But I'm none the less entitled to your conscientious care.

LADY BASSET.

Why then are you so nasty when I endeavour to dispose of you properly ?

MAUD.

Do you call it disposing of me properly to dispose of me to Mr. Ashdown ?

LADY BASSET.

He's the only person I've met who takes any notice of you !

MAUD.

You don't meet many people, I know, for every one runs away from you !

LADY BASSET.

My mother never did, my dear, as yours has done from you !

MAUD.

She'll come back as soon as she receives the account I've written her of your selfishness.

LADY BASSET.

It doesn't compare with hers, I think ; for I accepted, when I rashly consented to take you out, the problem she unnaturally shirked !

MAUD.

You took me from cold calculation—you knew I would prove attractive.

LADY BASSET, protesting, derisive.

Attractive ?

MAUD.

To single gentlemen—and others. And then let *you* get hold of them ! (After an instant, with triumphant emphasis.) That's not the sort of girl I am !

LADY BASSET.

If I had been aware of the sort you are I never would have looked at you ! I cable to Zanzibar that I throw you up.

MAUD.

You leave me unprotected ? Very well : I can face the usual dangers !

LADY BASSET.

You seem highly familiar with them ! (Then, after a moment, in a different tone, as if with a new, superseding thought.) Can you face Miss Jesmond ?

MAUD, blank.

What danger does *she* present ?

LADY BASSET.

That of producing an early impression on Sir Ralph Damant.

MAUD.

The gentleman about to arrive ?

LADY BASSET.

The nearest of kin, the heir to this lovely Courtlands.

MAUD.

How are you sure he's the heir ?

LADY BASSET.

Mr. Bedford's to make a new will. Mr. Lamb, his solicitor, is with him.

MAUD.

To make it in favour of Sir Ralph ?

LADY BASSET.

Naturally—if he has called him to his bedside.

MAUD, thoughtful.

Yes ; he wouldn't bring him from London only to cut him off ! But aren't there other relatives ?

LADY BASSET.

Far-away kindred—people with means of their own. I used to hear of them from my husband.

MAUD.

In the improvident days when you *had* a husband! Has no one else expectations?

LADY BASSET.

Miss Jesmond has plenty, I suppose!

MAUD, blank.

Do you mean he'll do *more* for her? Hasn't she lived on him for years?

LADY BASSET.

For the last four or five. She has enjoyed every luxury, in return for promiscuous services rendered as an "amanuensis"—functions mysterious and elastic! But as the daughter of an old friend—the clergyman who was this one's predecessor and who died without leaving a farthing—he may think her a deserving object.

MAUD, after an instant.

Do you mean she'll lie in wait for Sir Ralph?

LADY BASSET.

She's just that kind of person. It's the way she's dangerous. Therefore keep an eye on her.

MAUD, after another instant.

Do you set me to watch her so that you may be free to look after Sir Ralph?

LADY BASSET.

I give you my reasons for thinking that he may be of interest to her.

MAUD.

But why should she be of interest to him?

LADY BASSET.

Because she's so pretty and so clever.

MAUD.

Has she had the Higher Education? No? Then she's not a trained intelligence!

LADY BASSET.

I believe it *is* an intellectual gymnastic to cope with the coldness of Sir Ralph!

MAUD.

Is he so exempt from the weaknesses of his sex?

LADY BASSET.

I've never seen him, but I've heard of his peculiar attitude—the dread of the dizziness of great heights. He has a terror of eminent women—the fascination of the abyss. It's a fixed idea with him that if he neglects his defences he may some day take the jump.

MAUD.

Find himself practically engaged?

LADY BASSET.

Find himself legally married.

MAUD.

Are there such a lot of things to marry him for?

LADY BASSET.

Figure them up! A good old title—a creation of Elizabeth. A quiet mind about other women. A very good fortune, and (with a gesture for the whole place about them) a very fine prospect!

MAUD.

If he has money enough to go in fear, why does poor Mr. Bedford leave him more?

LADY BASSET.

To increase his terror—a harmless joke of the dear man!

MAUD.

Do you mean because Mr. Bedford himself has a passion for us?

LADY BASSET.

Uncontrolled—but platonic! Besides, there's no other cousin.

MAUD.

None at all?

LADY BASSET.

There *was* one, I believe, but he's lost to sight.

MAUD.

Trust him to turn up!

LADY BASSET.

They have trusted him, but always in vain. He was wild, he was worthless—good for nothing but America, to which he went.

MAUD.

If he went he can come back.

LADY BASSET.

Not, luckily, from the grave—luckily, I mean, for Sir Ralph. Mr. Bedford has knowledge of his death.

MAUD.

And have you knowledge of his name?

LADY BASSET.

His name? Mark Bernal.

MAUD, after an instant, rising.

I thank you for your solid facts. Very nice of you!

LADY BASSET.

Haven't I justified my warning about Miss Jesmond?

MAUD.

Perfectly. (After another instant, in the tone of one who has won a diplomatic victory.) Make her your charge!

LADY BASSET, blank; then disconcerted, indignant, rising.

You're ungrateful—and you're sly!

Enter MARK BERNAL from the outer hall.

MAUD, seeing him first ; privately.

Not a bit—see how frank I shall be with Sir Ralph !

LADY BASSET, to herself, startled, turning ; taking in MARK BERNAL with emotion and surprise.

Sir Ralph ?

BERNAL, a man of some three-and-thirty ; very good-looking, but of unconventional aspect ; with a long fair moustache, a mixed, informal suit, composed of articles that don't match ; a soft hat, a light overcoat over one arm and a painter's album, a sketch-book of moderate size—new and covered with brown linen—carried in the other : stopping short as he sees the two women, looking vaguely from one of them to the other ; then, eagerly, as he comes down.

My cousin's ill ? I heard in the village how grave it is.

LADY BASSET, solemnly sympathetic, but intensely gracious and reassuring.

The dear man suffers, but I'm watching !

MAUD, with the same effusion of condolence ; very ingratiating.

The party broke up ; but it seemed to me (smiling significantly at BERNAL) quite *not* the moment to turn one's back !

LADY BASSET.

At the door there was no one to receive you ?

BERNAL.

It stood wide open, and, as I rang in vain, I ventured at last to walk in.

MAUD, seductive.

You needn't have been afraid, with the place as good as your own !

LADY BASSET, irresistible.

You must let me share your authority till the servants are again at their posts.

BERNAL, who has looked, as they alternately address him, in bewilderment and mystification from one of the women to the other.

My "authority," madam, is small, and my title to possession *nil*!

LADY BASSET.

You speak from your characteristic reserve!

MAUD.

You'll find your essential strength when you've seen Mr. Bedford.

BERNAL, more and more confounded, but also dawningly amused.

My essential strength?

LADY BASSET, arch.

You can't evade your fate!

BERNAL, blank.

My fate?

LADY BASSET.

The way to learn it is to let me take you to our honoured friend.

MAUD, eagerly interposing.

Permit me to recommend your waiting, while this lady goes to ask leave.

BERNAL, hesitating afresh, thinking, looking still, in his guarded wonderment, from one of them to the other.

Is his present state very critical?

LADY BASSET.

Dear Maud will oblige you by ascertaining. He's shut up at present with his solicitor.

MAUD.

Inevitably, alas, at such a moment, with the future of such possessions at stake !

LADY BASSET.

Their commanding extent demands the presence of the family.

BERNAL, dazed, echoing.

The family ?

LADY BASSET.

Reduced to *you*, happy man, though you pretend you don't appreciate it !

BERNAL.

You accuse me of pretending, madam ; but I won't pretend I understand you ! (After an instant.) Give me time to turn round—I'm painfully affected. (Indicating the long window.) I'll go out a moment.

MAUD, almost pouncing on him.

Into the air ? I'll take you !

LADY BASSET, baffled by MAUD's alertness, looking round her quickly and spying BERNAL's album, which he has placed on a table and of which she possesses herself.

I'll take your charming companion !

BERNAL, anxious, ingenuous, demurring.

Then who'll be near my cousin ?

LADY BASSET.

The vicar, the lawyer, the doctor, the nurse.

MAUD, with a sarcastic inflection.

And also Miss Grace Jesmond !

BERNAL, vague.

Miss Grace Jesmond ?

LADY BASSET.

A person employed.

MAUD.

One of the fixtures.

BERNAL, innocent.

She goes with the house ?

LADY BASSET.

Scarcely to enhance its value !

MAUD.

She has value enough to be paid !

BERNAL, vague.

Paid ?

LADY BASSET.

Wages. She writes for the dear man, she reads for him, and I daresay she ciphers !

MAUD, who has possessed herself, officiously, to carry it, of BERNAL's light overcoat in the same way that Lady BASSET has appropriated the sketch-book.

But she hasn't had the Higher Education !

BERNAL, laughing and trying to take his coat back from MAUD.
I haven't had it myself! (Then as she whisks away the coat, escaping to the right.) Take care—there are things in the pockets!

MAUD, victorious, challenging; in the long window with the coat.
Then come and get them!

Flirts out to the park.

LADY BASSET, nursing the sketch-book; sociably, while BERNAL, at the window, appearing to hesitate, looks at her an instant.
Which of us do you prefer?

BERNAL, clapping the empty pockets of his waistcoat and jacket, as if with alarm, successively and quickly.
I prefer my cigarettes!

Exit BERNAL by the window.

LADY BASSET, disconcerted, considering.
Shall I follow—with this? (Opening the album; turning a page or two.) Real art?—my passion! (Then to herself, as she sees GRACE JESMOND at the left—enter GRACE JESMOND from the library—dropping the book on a table as if to disconnect herself from every sign of the visitor's passage.) Ah!

GRACE, back from the station, in her hat and jacket; stopping short, surprised at still finding Lady BASSET, and speaking impulsively.
You're not gone?

LADY BASSET, uncompromising.
And not going!

GRACE, struck, eager.
Then Mr. Bedford's better?

LADY BASSET, at the window ; vicious.

Mr. Bedford's worse !

Exit Lady BASSET to the park.

GRACE, alone, dolorous, interrogative.

“ Worse ? ”

Enter a FOOTMAN from the outer hall.

FOOTMAN.

Sir Ralph Damant !

Enter Sir RALPH DAMANT. Exit FOOTMAN.

GRACE, instantly, sadly

Mr. Bedford's worse !

SIR RALPH, stopping short with the force of his contained emotion.

Ah ? (Then, after an instant, while he has stood with lowered eyes.) How much worse ?

GRACE.

Even a little (thinking, discouraged) may be more than enough !

SIR RALPH.

How lately have you seen him ?

GRACE.

Not this morning. I've been at the station—seeing people off.

SIR RALPH.

He has had “ people ” again ?

GRACE.

A large party.

SIR RALPH.

Women, as usual?

GRACE.

Several ladies.

SIR RALPH.

They've all gone?

GRACE.

Not quite all.

SIR RALPH.

All but you?

GRACE.

I don't go (after an instant, with the note of quiet irony) quite yet.
And two others remain.

SIR RALPH, with a slight start and a glance round him.

Two others? Where *are* they?

GRACE, nodding toward the window.

I think in the park.

SIR RALPH, peremptory.

Then send them off!

GRACE, cold.

I'll leave you to do that.

SIR RALPH.

I've more immediate duties—I've been sent for.

GRACE.

So I heard—before going out.

SIR RALPH.

You range the country—with poor Mr. Bedford dying?

GRACE, after an instant.

I've not said that he's dying.

SIR RALPH, perceptibly pulled up.

Then, pray, why was I dragged here?

GRACE.

I had nothing to do with dragging you. His doctor's with him—and his clergyman. And Mr. Lamb, his lawyer.

SIR RALPH, after a moment.

For testamentary purposes?

GRACE.

Very likely. It was Mr. Lamb's idea to wire to you.

SIR RALPH.

What does he want me to do?

GRACE.

I haven't the least idea.

SIR RALPH.

He shouldn't trifle (hesitating) with my habits! I've not been here for years.

GRACE.

Just five. Your last visit was the year I came.

SIR RALPH.

There have always been too many women.

GRACE.

I've had the misfortune to be one of them.

SIR RALPH.

"One" is quite enough. In some cases, indeed, too much. I recognise—in general—your inevitable character, but I hate to be the subject of manœuvres.

GRACE.

It must be very odious. It has never been my fate.

SIR RALPH.

I can easily believe it. Keep out of them !

GRACE.

We can each—for ourselves—abstain from them.

SIR RALPH, looking at her hard an instant.

That's exactly what I do! I neither practise nor permit them. (Then after another instant, during which GRACE gives a silent, decorous, but inexpressive movement of assent.) Have other relations been summoned?

GRACE.

Others? I think there *are* no others.

SIR RALPH, gratified, complacent.

Only me? There are persons remotely connected, but I appreciate the discrimination.

GRACE.

Mr. Lamb, last night, asked me a question.

SIR RALPH.

In regard to your personal pretensions?

GRACE, surprised.

Mine? (With genuine melancholy dignity.) What pretensions have I, Sir Ralph?

SIR RALPH.

You're the sort of person who usually has extraordinary ones!

GRACE.

How do you know what sort of person I am?

SIR RALPH.

I admit that I've been reduced to speculate. (After an instant, somewhat tentatively.) I've wondered, for instance, if you're paid.

GRACE.

For my work?

SIR RALPH.

Or have only your bed and board.

GRACE.

And my washing? Let me relieve you. I've had a salary.

SIR RALPH, *relieved.*

Ah, that settles the question !

GRACE, *vague.*

What question ?

SIR RALPH.

That of your expectations. You took them out in his life.

GRACE.

You speak as if his life were over !

SIR RALPH.

An inadvertence. But from the moment the lawyers take the field— !

GRACE.

It was to ask me about Mark Bernal.

SIR RALPH, *struck ; vague an instant.*

Mark Bernal ?

GRACE.

Who was mentioned in an earlier will.

SIR RALPH, *thinking.*

Little Mark, shabby little Mark—whom I knew as a boy, a small boy when I was a big one : my cousin's cousin and my own cousin ? (*With extreme emphasis and decision.*) Why, all the world knows he's dead.

GRACE.

Mr. Lamb's aware of that rumour.

SIR RALPH.

It ain't a rumour—it's a fact !

GRACE.

Requiring proof. There are four thousand a year—

SIR RALPH, breaking in.

Four thousand a year ?

GRACE.

For somebody !

SIR RALPH, after an instant.

Not for shabby little Mark !

GRACE.

So it would appear. Mr. Bedford, last night, was not to be disturbed ; so that Mr. Lamb's question was as to whether, during the five years I've lived here, I had heard of any communication from Mr. Bernal.

SIR RALPH, complacently affirmative.

And you've heard of none !

GRACE.

None whatever.

SIR RALPH.

Then that's the proof required. Mark's mother was a cousin of our cousin—that's the degree.

GRACE.

The same degree as your degree.

SIR RALPH, after an instant, as if reluctant to admit it.

The same degree as mine. (Then with much more alacrity.) But a connection—undesirable. They were people of no position.

GRACE, ironically dubious, surprised.

Cousins of *yours*?

SIR RALPH, totally unconscious of her irony: candidly confidential.

I never ran after them. The mother died, the father died, and Mark, who used to come here for his holidays, made a sad mess of his prospects.

GRACE.

Prospects? What prospects?

SIR RALPH.

A presumptive interest in the four thousand. He took to low courses; I believe he took to painting portraits. He wore queer clothes and knew queer people. He was wild—I'm convinced he was wicked. His tastes were vulgar; his abilities mean. He went to the bottom—he went to America.

GRACE.

Where—in the far west—he died, in a brawl, unappreciated.

SIR RALPH.

But not uncommemorated. (After an instant.) The papers mentioned it.

GRACE.

And if they hadn't?

SIR RALPH, pointing judiciously the moral.

Why, he might have come in for something!

GRACE, turning away with a vague general sigh.

It makes one hate them! (Then seeing the VICAR, and addressing him, introducing Sir RALPH. Re-enter the VICAR from the outer hall, heated and breathless, still with MAUD VANNECK's bag.) Sir Ralph Damant.

THE VICAR.

I missed you by crossing the fields!

SIR RALPH, distant, sarcastic, superior.

I'm never to be found in the "fields"!

GRACE.

Will you kindly inform Mr. Lamb?

THE VICAR.

And what shall I do with the bag?

GRACE, amused, indicating indulgently a place to put it down.

Part with it—there!

THE VICAR, depositing the bag with scrupulous care and extreme relief.

There! (Then up at the right.) I'll announce Sir Ralph.

Exit the VICAR to the right.

Re-enter from the outer hall TEDDY ASHDOWN.

TEDDY, seeing the bag.

He's back with it? (Confidingly, familiarly, to both the others.)
Such a chase!

SIR RALPH, struck with the elation of his tone and regarding the bag—
conspicuously and showily a lady's—with cold suspicion.

Pray, sir, is it yours?

GRACE.

It belongs to Miss Vanneck.

SIR RALPH.

And who on earth's Miss Vanneck?

GRACE, up at the door to the outer hall, to TEDDY.

Your friends are in the park. Instruct Sir Ralph while
I see about his room.

Exit GRACE JESMOND.

TEDDY, artless, guileless; producing his effects on Sir RALPH
without intention.

Fearfully clever girl, Miss Vanneck; she's had the
Higher Education.

SIR RALPH.

Mercy!

TEDDY.

A trained intelligence. She came with Lady Basset.

SIR RALPH.

And who on earth's Lady Basset?

TEDDY.

Awfully sharp too. She's waiting for you.

SIR RALPH, dismayed.

Waiting for me?

TEDDY.

She was going ; but she stayed.

SIR RALPH, echoing.

Stayed?

TEDDY.

On purpose to meet you. She knows you're the Heir!

Good God, I'm *not* the Heir!

You're not?

I *am* ; but it's none of her business!

TEDDY, innocently disconcerted.

Mayn't I tell her, then?

SIR RALPH.

Don't dream of it! Be so good as to remain with me.

TEDDY, who has gone to the long window.

I was thinking of joining "dear Maud"!

SIR RALPH.

The trained intelligence? (As if with a hopeful thought.) Are you in love with it?

TEDDY.

I suppose that's what's the matter with me !

SIR RALPH.

Then marry the creature !

TEDDY.

She won't look at me ; she wants a decent fortune.

SIR RALPH, after an instant.

What does she call a decent fortune ?

TEDDY.

Four thousand a year.

SIR RALPH, dismayed again.

Four thousand ?

TEDDY.

She has fixed that figure. Of course I'm stone broke.
My governor has stopped payment.

SIR RALPH.

Then make an effort—find something to do.

TEDDY.

That's exactly what I'm looking for !

SIR RALPH.

Continue to look—look hard ! (Then, as TEDDY seems restless.)
And whatever you do, stay here ! (Encouraging, reassuring.)
Sit down—amuse yourself ! (Looking round, nervously, for pretexts)

for detaining, beguiling him, Sir RALPH's eye falls on MARK BERNAL's album, which Lady BASSET has placed on one of the tables and which he takes up.)
I see you sketch.

TEDDY, seated.

Oh yes ; I've the artistic nature.

SIR RALPH

Fall back on it !

TEDDY.

I *am* falling ! I feel I've a little gift that only requires direction.

SIR RALPH.

Then direct it ! (Turning over two or three pages of the album ; patronisingly, commendingly.) I like the steam-roller !

TEDDY, vague.

What steam-roller ?

SIR RALPH, passing him the open book.

That one.

TEDDY, with the album.

It's not mine. (Looking at the cover.) It's awfully *like* mine !
(Then on his feet again.) It belongs (turning to the flyleaf and reading)
to "Mark Bernal."

SIR RALPH, immensely startled.

Mark Bernal ?

TEDDY, unconscious of his start, continuing to read from the page.

"Mark Bernal, Vandyke Lodge, Chelsea ; September '91." (Then glancing again at the outside of the album.) A jolly new book.

SIR RALPH, taking it back from TEDDY's hand and repeating, in his guarded amazement, interrogatively, but mechanically.

A jolly new book?

TEDDY.

Dated last month. Who *is* Mark Bernal?

SIR RALPH, who has stared hard a moment at the name on the flyleaf, and then, looking up, presented a pale, alarmed, conjectural face.

I haven't the least idea!

TEDDY, to whom, recovering himself with a great effort, and as if it doesn't matter or mean anything to him, he has surrendered the album again.

Somebody has left it. (Then reverting to the drawing of which Sir RALPH has spoken.) By Jove, I'll *copy* the steam-roller!

SIR RALPH, uneasy, as TEDDY, with the album under his arm, goes to the long window.

Where are you going?

TEDDY.

To join the ladies!

Exit TEDDY ASHDOWN, with the album, to the park.

SIR RALPH, alone, deeply agitated, wonderstruck.

Mark Bernal—last month? Here, and nobody knows? (Then, to himself, seeing the VICAR reappear: re-enter the VICAR from the right.) Will *he* know? (To the VICAR, eager.) My cousin's worse?

THE VICAR, with a memorandum in his hand.

He keeps up—for Mr. Lamb—but the doctor deprecates his seeing you. Therefore I'm desired by Mr. Lamb to put you an important question.

SIR RALPH, nervous, anxious.

An important question ?

THE VICAR, highly responsible and a little embarrassed.

Confided to my discretion—on the subject of a relative.

SIR RALPH, more guarded.

A relative ?

THE VICAR, who has again consulted his memorandum ; looking at Sir RALPH, while his pencil taps his chin, over his glasses.

Mr. Mark Moorsom Bernal.

SIR RALPH, silent, motionless a moment ; then, with intensely studied collectedness, while he sees GRACE JESMOND reappear.

What of Mr. Mark Moorsom Bernal ?

Re-enter, as he speaks, GRACE JESMOND from the outer hall, with several open letters in her hand.

THE VICAR.

He's believed not to be living.

SIR RALPH, while GRACE, who on recognising the manner in which they are engaged, has first stopped short and then, on reflection, come down discreetly on the side of the stage opposite Sir RALPH's and remained there effacing herself and waiting ; only looking over her letters.

Believed—universally !

THE VICAR, referring again to his paper.

Mr. Bedford has taken it for granted ! But it has occurred to him, for his completer satisfaction, to cause it to be inquired of you, while he has still power to inquire, if any intimation to the contrary— (Pausing scrupulously an instant, smiling bland'y, explanatorily at GRACE.)

SIR RALPH.

If any intimation to the contrary—?

THE VICAR.

Has lately reached your ears.

SIR RALPH, after a moment, during which his eyes have met GRACE'S, raised from her letters fixedly to his own in consequence of the VICAR'S invitation to her.

No intimation to the contrary has ever reached my ears.

THE VICAR, appreciative, satisfied, folding up his paper.

Most definite ; thank you. (Then to GRACE, sentimentally, professionally.) Awfully sad !

GRACE, grave.

Awfully ! (Then to Sir RALPH.) I came back to tell you that your apartment is ready for you—the King's Room, as we call it. As I've pressing letters to answer (indicating the library) perhaps the Vicar will kindly take you to it.

SIR RALPH, reluctant to leave the room and with an uneasy movement looking covertly about him as if still preoccupied with the rapid disappearance, the whereabouts, of the album.

I won't trouble the Vicar. I remember the King's Room.

THE VICAR, up at the right, obliging, punctilious.

Off the main gallery—three steps !

Exit the VICAR to the right.

Re-enter Lady BASSET by the long window.

GRACE, at the door of the library.

I leave you then to Lady Basset!

Exit GRACE to the library.

LADY BASSET, breathless.

Mr. Ashdown has just told me it's *you* who are Sir Ralph!

SIR RALPH, staring, unapproachable.

Pray who else should it be?

LADY BASSET, as if with relief and rapture.

I like you the better of the two!

SIR RALPH, blank.

Of which two?

LADY BASSET.

Why, there's a gentleman passing for you!

SIR RALPH, aghast.

Passing for me?

LADY BASSET.

Passing for the Heir—it's the same thing!

SIR RALPH, after an instant.

Possibly! (After another instant.) Where is this gentleman?

LADY BASSET.

You must ask Miss Vanneck; she has designs on him.

SIR RALPH.

Designs?

LADY BASSET.

Matrimonial. Fancy her crudity !

SIR RALPH.

I can easily fancy it ! But if he isn't me, who may this person be ?

LADY BASSET.

Ask the man ! It's enough for *me* that *you* are you !

SIR RALPH.

It's enough for you, madam ; but it's sometimes too much for myself ! Your news is not agreeable to me, and I beg you to permit me to retire.

LADY BASSET.

You're going to your room ? Allow me to show you the way !

SIR RALPH.

I know the way. (Then to settle the matter—keep her quiet.) Off the main gallery—three steps.

LADY BASSET, delighted.

Three steps ? So is mine ! I'm going to mine.

SIR RALPH, after an instant.

Then I remain. When did this scoundrel arrive ?

LADY BASSET.

But a moment, I judge, before yourself.

SIR RALPH.

And who else has seen him?

LADY BASSET.

No one but Miss Vanneck.

SIR RALPH.

Not Miss Jesmond?

LADY BASSET.

Not Miss Jesmond. She's remiss!

SIR RALPH, looking at his watch.

What's his appearance?

LADY BASSET.

Very fine, I'm bound to confess. (Then significantly.) But you can hold your own, Sir Ralph!

SIR RALPH.

I pass my life, madam, in trying to! Is this interloper plausible—artful?

LADY BASSET, after an instant.

Artful—in a sense. He cultivates art!

SIR RALPH, struck.

He draws—he paints?

LADY BASSET.

In a style of his own. He had an album. (Looking about her.) It was here.

SIR RALPH, precipitate.

I haven't seen it! (Then after a moment's intense and troubled thought; breaking out frankly and abruptly.) Will you grant me a favour, madam?

LADY BASSET, radiant.

Every favour a woman can!

SIR RALPH.

One is enough. Simply not to mention that I've asked you these questions.

LADY BASSET, struck, diplomatic, considering.

Not to "mention" it?

SIR RALPH.

To forget our conversation.

LADY BASSET.

That will surely be difficult! (Then after reflection.) What do you offer me for this failure of memory?

SIR RALPH.

"Offer" you? My gratitude, madam—my enlightened esteem.

LADY BASSET.

"Esteem," Sir Ralph, is rather cold. The price of discretion is always high. (Then, smiling, as he appears to demur.) A woman's silence, you know, comes dear!

SIR RALPH.

There's nothing in life so expensive. Therefore I don't haggle with you. I extend to you my personal regard.

LADY BASSET, arch.

How "personal" are you prepared to make it?

SIR RALPH, after a moment.

My opportunities shall show you.

LADY BASSET.

I await the demonstration!

SIR RALPH.

On the distinct understanding—?

LADY BASSET.

It's for *you* to treat it as one!

SIR RALPH, at the door to the outer hall as that of the library opens.

Then I begin. Silence to *her*!

Exit Sir RALPH rapidly. Re-enter GRACE JESMOND from the library.

LADY BASSET, disconcerted, blank.

Does he call that "beginning"? (Then in a totally different tone to GRACE, who has two sealed and stamped letters which she takes straight up to the big letter-box of the house.) Sir Ralph's adorable!

GRACE, after an instant, as she posts her letters.

Adorable!

LADY BASSET.

And Mr. Bedford?

GRACE, coming down.

He keeps up.

LADY BASSET, with a shade of disappointment.

No alteration?

GRACE.

None whatever.

LADY BASSET, after an instant.

When it comes, please let me know.

Exit Lady BASSET to the outer hall.

Re-enter TEDDY ASHDOWN, with the album, by the long window.

GRACE, kind, as she sees the album.

Have you been sketching?

TEDDY, discouraged.

I've been looking for "dear Maud"!

GRACE.

All in vain?

TEDDY.

High and low. I've no heart for the steam-roller!

GRACE, vague.

The steam-roller?

TEDDY, holding out the album, which GRACE takes.

There's one in there. You should send it after him.

GRACE.

After whom?

TEDDY.

Mark Bernal.

GRACE, blank.

Mark Bernal?

TEDDY.

There's his address. (Then as he perceives her surprise.) He hasn't been here?

GRACE, who has opened the book and turned to the flyleaf; staring, astounded, at the inscription.

Been here? He's dead!

TEDDY, bewildered.

"Dead?"

GRACE, with all her mystification, but a dawning relief and pleasure almost a cry of exultation.

He's alive! (Then as she rapidly turns the book over.) Where did you *get* this?

TEDDY.

From Sir Ralph Damant.

GRACE, struck.

Sir Ralph Damant?

TEDDY, increasingly surprised at her emotion, at the importance she appears to attach to the circumstance.

He gave it to me. (Indicating the table.) He picked it up there.

GRACE, staring.

There? How did it come there?

TEDDY.

Blessed if I know! No more did *he*.

GRACE.

Did he see this name?

TEDDY.

I read it out—I showed it to him.

GRACE.

And what did he say?

TEDDY.

He said he didn't know the person.

GRACE, after a moment.

How long ago was this?

TEDDY, looking at his watch.

Before I went out—half an hour.

GRACE.

Are you certain?

TEDDY.

Certain! I noticed the clock.

GRACE, who has stood a moment intensely wondering and thinking, then has gone up impulsively to the right with the album and, checking herself, come down again.

Can you keep the secret?

TEDDY.

Is it a secret ?

GRACE.

Make it one ! Tell no one you've seen this.

TEDDY.

But Sir Ralph knows I have.

GRACE.

And you know *he* has. That's why I want you to be dumb.

TEDDY, staring.

But if he speaks ?

GRACE.

He won't speak !

TEDDY.

Then *I* won't !

GRACE.

Thank you ! (Then, while MARK BERNAL, unseen by either, reappears : re-enter MARK BERNAL by the long window.) Now go to Miss Vanneck !

BERNAL, smiling, coming down.

You'll find her beyond the village, sketching the old mill ! (Then while the others, startled, stare at him interrogatively, he goes on, after an inclination to GRACE, soothingly and socially.) I posted her there with a block and a pencil.

TEDDY, precipitate.

Then I'll join her !

Exit TEDDY by the long window.

BERNAL, frankly, amicably.

I see *you* have my album ; but I had fortunately in my overcoat pocket another string to my bow !

GRACE, after a moment, breathless, amazed.

Are you Mark Moorsom Bernal ?

BERNAL, assenting, smiling.

Are *you* Grace Jesmond ?

GRACE, surprised, touched.

What do you know of Grace Jesmond, Mr. Bernal ?

BERNAL.

What those ladies, what my brilliant pupil out there, have been so good as to tell me.

GRACE.

You've seen them—you've had time to talk with them ?

BERNAL.

They received me when I came.

GRACE.

And when on earth did you come—and whence ?

BERNAL.

From London—an hour ago. To find a troubled house !

GRACE.

Mr. Bedford's very ill—and unaware of your presence.

BERNAL.

I've been taken for some one else !

GRACE.

Sir Ralph Damant ? He has just arrived.

BERNAL.

Will he see me ?

GRACE, after an instant.

It would surprise him to do so ! He thinks you're dead.

BERNAL, struck, smiling, penitent.

That's one for my bad manners !

GRACE, kind, impulsive.

Your manners seem good enough ! (Then after an instant.)
But you must save your inheritance.

BERNAL, vague.

My inheritance ?

GRACE.

Mr. Bedford's making his will, and you've a primary title to figure in it.

BERNAL, surprised, slightly disconcerted.

Ah, Miss Jesmond, I didn't come to life for *that* !

GRACE.

Didn't you know of your chance ?

BERNAL.

Know of it? I don't even understand it!

GRACE.

Surely you're aware of the fewness of your relatives.

BERNAL.

I've been conscious mainly of a different order of privation!

GRACE.

The only person interested, as they say, is Sir Ralph.

BERNAL.

And you, Miss Jesmond—are *you* not interested?

GRACE, surprised.

I, Mr. Bernal? (Then after an instant.) I'm a servant!

BERNAL.

A servant?

GRACE.

I mean that I've done my work and had my wage. And in that useful capacity, by your leave, I should announce your arrival to Mr. Bedford.

BERNAL, demurring.

Let him learn it, please, at his convenience.

GRACE.

Do you think nothing of your own?

BERNAL, *vague*.

My own?

GRACE.

With his weakness—time presses.

BERNAL.

If he's so weak, why worry him? I've neglected him too long to have rights.

GRACE.

I happen to know that he has had your rights in mind.

BERNAL.

Then he'll leave me something!

GRACE.

Unfortunately he supposes that they've lapsed. But from the moment that lapse is repaired—

BERNAL, *breaking in*.

He'll "remember" me, as they say? I don't want to be remembered as a beggar!

GRACE.

You're no more a beggar than others!

BERNAL, *vague*.

What others?

GRACE.

There are people who are not here for sentiment.

BERNAL.

You take a kind view of me, Miss Jesmond.

GRACE, after an instant ; frank.

I want you not to be sacrificed.

BERNAL.

It would convey a startling suggestion of my being good for something ! I smoke pretty much everywhere, but I've never smoked on the altar !

GRACE.

If you're not serious now, I'm afraid you'll never be !

BERNAL, sympathetic, emphatic.

Yes—on the day I can do something to contribute to your interests ! Please believe that I'm deeply touched by the attention you give to mine.

GRACE, after an instant, taking again from a table the album which at the beginning of the scene she has laid on it.

Do you know how to acknowledge it ? (Then as he stares while she holds up the book.) By giving me this.

BERNAL, blank.

"Giving" it to you ?

GRACE.

Letting me keep it.

BERNAL, assenting with mystified amusement.

For all it's worth !

GRACE.

We'll see what it's worth. (Then moving to go.) But every moment counts.

BERNAL.

Because he's failing?

GRACE.

He *shan't* fail!

BERNAL.

If the shock may hurt him, I decline the responsibility!

GRACE, at the door to the right.

Then I'll take it!

Exit GRACE with the album.

BERNAL, alone.

What an interesting crisis — and what an attractive woman!

Re-enter Sir RALPH DAMANT from the outer hall, precipitate, headlong in his discomposure.

SIR RALPH, with an agitated grievance that breaks out, beyond any other preoccupation, to the first person he sees.

Is there no place in the house that's safe from her?

BERNAL, vague.

From Miss Jesmond?

SIR RALPH.

From Lady Basset! (Then startled, with a wild stare.) Heavens! are *you* Mark Bernal?

BERNAL, smiling.

Did you know I was here?

SIR RALPH.

Never in the world ! But your face comes back to me.

BERNAL.

I thought you thought I was dead.

SIR RALPH.

You played the part so well !

BERNAL.

I indeed forgot the "house" ! But I now feel as if I were making my bow to it—though I'm not wholly sure I've had a call ! (Then after another look at Sir RALPH.) You don't look, cousin, as if the call had come from *you* !

SIR RALPH.

I'm not fond of theatricals : I go in for the real thing. Why have we been elaborately deceived ?

BERNAL.

Because that was the scale of your credulity ! I did engage, at Portland, Oregon, in a silly row, from an honourable motive, a motive with a funny accent, but with lovely appealing eyes. I interfered, in other words, in a domestic discussion, in the settlement of which I was left for dead on the field.

SIR RALPH.

It served you right ; you interfered on the wrong side !

BERNAL.

That was the opinion of the lively local press, which, in huge headlines, pointed the moral of my error. It therefore remained silent when I at last picked myself up, for my recovery was a different reading of the lesson.

SIR RALPH.

You might have given us a sign !

BERNAL.

A sign of what ? That I was an ass ? You had let me suspect you knew it already !

SIR RALPH.

Yet you've faced us to-day.

BERNAL.

It has taken me a month—since my return—to make up my mind to it !

SIR RALPH.

You brought back a fortune ?

BERNAL.

Of exactly five pounds !

SIR RALPH.

Don't you practise your trade ?

BERNAL.

Of which of my trades do you speak ? I've tried too many—I've wasted my time !

SIR RALPH.

You've been dissolute ?

BERNAL.

I've been universal !

SIR RALPH.

Then you're not a painter ?

BERNAL.

The critics say so ; but I can't afford to believe them.
I've returned to my early faith !

SIR RALPH.

Taking portraits ?

BERNAL, amused.

At so much a head !

SIR RALPH.

How much ?

BERNAL, looking at him an instant ; then jocular.

A thousand pounds ! (Sir RALPH gives a gesture of solemn dismay, and at the same moment BERNAL sees MAUD VANNECK. Re-enter MAUD VANNECK by the long window ; on which BERNAL continues, indicating her sociably.)

My portraits are dear, but Miss Vanneck can tell you for how little I give lessons !

MAUD, to BERNAL, coming down eagerly.

Introduce me !

SIR RALPH, still more peremptory.

Don't !

BERNAL, with a humorous want of mercy and the gesture of presenting.

Sir Ralph Damant—my favourite pupil !

MAUD, arch and engaging, to Sir RALPH.

If he's nothing but a drawing-master, you must forgive my mistaking him at first for *you* !

BERNAL.

Now that your error is righted, I expect to be completely neglected !

SIR RALPH, much disconcerted and disgusted, turning his back on MAUD.

You should keep your favourites in hand ! (Then seeing Lady BASSET : re-enter Lady BASSET from the outer hall.) Ain't *she* a favourite too ? For God's sake keep *her* !

LADY BASSET, who has removed her hat and exchanged her travelling-dress for something very smart and advantageous ; smiling significantly at Sir RALPH.

You see I've taken off my things !

MAUD, presenting, with an undiscouraged smile, the sleeve of her jacket to Sir RALPH.

Sir Ralph himself will kindly take off mine !

Sir RALPH makes a gesture of incorruptible austerity, and TEDDY ASHDOWN, at the moment MAUD speaks, re-enters by the long window.

TEDDY, rushing forward, assisting MAUD.

I say—that's *my* privilege !

MAUD, provoked at Sir RALPH and in her petulance thrusting at TEDDY a long pin taken from her dress.

Then keep this pin !

TEDDY, wounded by the pin and giving a start, a sharp cry while GRACE
JESMOND reappears.
Aie !

Re-enter GRACE JESMOND from the right.

GRACE, on one side of the stage while BERNAL is on the other.

I've been with the Doctor, Mr. Bernal. (Then, after an instant, grave, as the VICAR reappears : re-enter the VICAR from the right.)
He sends the Vicar with a request.

THE VICAR, flurried and formal as before, addressing them all.

I request your indulgence for my errand. The Doctor considers that a high standard of tranquillity has not been successfully maintained.

BERNAL, solicitous, precipitate.

Of course we're an awful nuisance—do tell him I'll go this moment !

GRACE, promptly interposing.

Mr. Bernal—please remain !

THE VICAR.

We must part—reluctantly !—with those who've so conscientiously—

GRACE, helping him out.

Misconceived their duty. Lady Basset and Miss Van-neck will find a carriage at the door.

LADY BASSET, deeply disconcerted and disgusted, looks resentfully from GRACE JESMOND to the VICAR; then with the movement of accepting under compulsion an odious necessity, turns expressively to SIR RALPH.

We're separated by violence—but I return to take leave of you!

Exit Lady BASSET to the outer hall.

MAUD, playfully, to Sir RALPH.

Not even violence, if a single word—

SIR RALPH.

A single word? Farewell!

MAUD, in the same way.

Ah, that *is* violence!

TEDDY, with frank alacrity, to GRACE.

I'll also go in the carriage.

GRACE.

A moment, Mr. Ashdown. (Then after an instant.) Sir Ralph, can we part with Mr. Ashdown?

SIR RALPH, struck and surprised, mystified and alarmed by her tone; but presently replying with an impenetrable face.

If I may answer for myself—without a pang!

GRACE, kind, to TEDDY.

See to your things then, and come back and take leave of us!

TEDDY, who has been admiring MAUD's sketching-block, looking sociably at BERNAL.

I hate to take leave of Mr. Bernal, because I want him to give me a lesson.

BERNAL, vague, good-humoured.

A lesson ?

TEDDY.

In Miss Vanneck's class !

BERNAL, assenting amicably ; amused.

Look me up in town.

TEDDY, highly pleased.

In town !

Exit TEDDY to the outer hall with the sketching-block.

THE VICAR.

The Doctor consents that Sir Ralph and Mr. Bernal shall each see his patient.

SIR RALPH, taking instant precedence.

Then I go !

GRACE, arresting him.

A moment, Sir Ralph ! (To BERNAL.) Mr. Bernal, you go first. (Then as BERNAL hesitates, indicating Sir RALPH's prior right.) I've something to say to Sir Ralph.

THE VICAR, to BERNAL at the door to the right.

This way !

BERNAL, to GRACE, grave, hesitating.

Will he know me ?

GRACE.

Try !

BERNAL, at the door to the right ; his eyes on her with the same seriousness.

I'll try !

Exeunt MARK BERNAL and the VICAR.

GRACE, after an instant.

The will's made !

SIR RALPH, staring.

Then what's the use of Mark's going ?

GRACE.

It's not too late to make another.

SIR RALPH.

He'll hold out ?

GRACE.

The Doctor hopes so—with the sight of Mr. Bernal.

SIR RALPH.

Sufficiently to make the effort—?

GRACE.

After a rest—to-morrow.

SIR RALPH, stupefied ; artless.

He'll live till to-morrow ?

GRACE.

Possibly much longer—with care. There must of course be no drawback.

SIR RALPH.

Won't it be a drawback to see Mark?

GRACE.

It will be a great joy. The drawback will be the sense of his mistake.

SIR RALPH, as if vague.

His mistake?

GRACE.

His failure—an hour ago—to be aware that, at the very moment he consented to accept as certified the death of a possible legatee, that legatee, by the most extraordinary of chances, had passed through his house and might, but for a fatality, have stood beside his bed!

SIR RALPH.

A fatality?

GRACE.

That of his having escaped observation.

SIR RALPH, conscious, but very emphatic.

Completely!

GRACE.

And left no sign of his presence.

SIR RALPH, with the same serene assurance.

None at all! (GRACE, with an irrepressible nervous movement, turns away at this, and he goes on.) So that our poor friend *did* accept my cousin's death as certified?

GRACE.

With your attestation to sustain him, how could he do less?

SIR RALPH, *complacent*.

My attestation was unconscious of its fallacy!

GRACE.

Just as poor Mr. Bernal was unconscious of your attestation!

SIR RALPH.

A fellow shouldn't really do such things!

GRACE.

Return so unexpectedly?

SIR RALPH.

After having vanished so finally.

GRACE.

There's no doubt he has behaved very ill; so that if Mr. Bedford does hold out, he'll come off better than he deserves!

SIR RALPH.

And if Mr. Bedford passes away—?

GRACE.

Don't the actual dispositions take effect?

SIR RALPH, *thinking an instant; then just a shade rueful*.

Unless Mark fights.

GRACE.

Oh, he may fight !

SIR RALPH, prompt.

Do you think he will ?

GRACE.

That would depend on his suspicion of how narrowly he had missed his luck !

SIR RALPH, considering, as if objecting to the expression.

How "narrowly" ?

GRACE.

He might guess that it had hung by a hair.

SIR RALPH.

What do you call a hair ?

GRACE.

Why, your fatal answer to the Vicar.

SIR RALPH.

If it was fatal, madam, it was at least perfectly natural.

GRACE, after an instant.

So is Mr. Bernal's disappointment !

SIR RALPH, as if with forced and resentful resignation to her objectionableness.

Which it's in your power, doubtless, to exacerbate !

GRACE, quiet.

I don't know what's in my power, Sir Ralph! We never know till we try.

SIR RALPH.

Your threats are in shocking taste, if Mr. Bedford's to make another will!

GRACE.

Let us take that quite for granted! (At the door of the library.) And now I must go back to my letters.

SIR RALPH.

Before you do so you'll perhaps let me know the motive of this extraordinary aggression. (Then more defiant as, with her hand on the door of the library, GRACE only stands looking fixedly at him.) What the mischief do you mean by it?

GRACE, after a moment more of the same significant and expressive attitude. Can't you guess?

Exit GRACE JESMOND.

SIR RALPH, alone, staring, wondering; then as if with a sudden vision of the truth.

By all that's portentous, I *can* guess! She wants to make me propose! (Then eager, as he sees MARK BERNAL: re-enter MARK BERNAL from the right.) Did he know you?

BERNAL.

The Doctor thought so. He stared for a long moment, dear man—then he closed his kind eyes.

SIR RALPH, in suspense.

Is he much weaker ?

BERNAL.

About the same.

SIR RALPH.

Then he'll go on ?

BERNAL, confident.

If all goes well.

SIR RALPH, considering ; then after an instant.

And I'm to go up now ?

BERNAL, looking at his watch.

At one, please. (Looking round him.) Where's Miss Jesmond ?

SIR RALPH.

She has left me, thank God !

BERNAL, surprised.

Why abnormal gratitude ?

SIR RALPH.

For miraculous relief. She wants to marry me. She's like the others.

BERNAL.

The others ?

SIR RALPH.

The old woman and the girl. They've marked me, you know. But Miss Jesmond has marked me biggest.

BERNAL, *amused*.

In bright red chalk?

SIR RALPH, *with a nervous wriggle*.

I feel it between the shoulders! She's an *intrigante*—of a peculiarly dangerous type.

BERNAL.

Why, I thought her so charming!

SIR RALPH.

She has made up to *you* too?

BERNAL, *smiling*.

Like the others!

SIR RALPH.

She's a hungry adventuress.

BERNAL.

With me it doesn't matter; I'm not worth their powder.

SIR RALPH.

Because you're poor?

BERNAL.

Because I'm nobody.

SIR RALPH.

Be duly grateful. It protects you.

BERNAL.

My dear man, I like danger!

SIR RALPH.

You don't *know* it! To know it, you must be exposed.

BERNAL.

I see—even as you are.

SIR RALPH.

My position is one of the highest peril.

BERNAL.

You're a match, a catch, a swell: you pay for it!

SIR RALPH.

I pay too much and too often. I pay with my comfort, my health, my nerves! My nerves are gone to pieces—I live in a state of siege!

BERNAL.

But you seem to hold out.

SIR RALPH.

There are very serious breaches. It's the modern methods of attack—they've reduced it to a science.

BERNAL.

Lady Basset's a kind of Moltke?

SIR RALPH.

And Miss Jesmond's a kind of Armstrong! I vow I'm doomed to fall!

BERNAL.

My dear fellow, don't you desire to fall?

SIR RALPH.

At my own time, in my own place—not in the din of battle, amid the yells of victory.

BERNAL.

I enjoy the din of battle; and the yells of victory have only to come from pretty lips—!

SIR RALPH.

Do you mean you actually *like* women?

BERNAL.

It sounds dreadful, but I should be a brute if I didn't. They've been my consolation.

SIR RALPH.

They're the luxury of the poor! You can afford natural pleasures. You ought to recognise the fact that your limitations are your liberty.

BERNAL.

The liberty to love? May I never lose it!

SIR RALPH.

I shall be glad to assist you to retain it. Remain exactly as you are, and you will.

BERNAL.

I'm afraid there's very little doubt that I shall remain exactly as I am. I always *have* remained exactly as I am! You make me feel indeed a sort of eternal *tableau vivant*, and inspire me to positively decline to rise. But while I luxuriate in my limitations, as you so happily describe them, what on earth will become of *you*?

SIR RALPH.

I shall probably succumb to the mockery of my advantages and the ferocity of my pursuers.

BERNAL.

The real way to escape, my dear man, is to marry.

SIR RALPH, with a start.

Marry whom?

BERNAL, diverted, staring.

Any one you like!

SIR RALPH, with his hand to his heart.

I thought you meant Miss Jesmond! (Giving him his hand.)
See how my pulse throbs!

BERNAL, feeling the hand while Sir RALPH pants.

You're indeed a wreck!

SIR RALPH, instinctively, unconsciously wiping his hand with his pocket-handkerchief and going on argumentatively.

You say "any one I like." But I don't like any one!
I hate them all, and yet they're always *with* me!

BERNAL, after looking at him an instant with amused compassion.

Let me help you !

SIR RALPH.

Upon my soul, I think you ought ! You've the happy lot—the ideal life : you owe something to others !

BERNAL.

But what can I do ?

SIR RALPH.

Draw the assailants off—keep them at bay !

BERNAL, considering, responding, entering into it.

While you gain time—get away ? Happy thought ! I'll do what I can : I'll cover your retreat.

SIR RALPH.

I count upon you ! And your profit, your reward—

BERNAL, taking the words out of his mouth, gaily expressing the idea.

Will be in the very nature of the task—the exercise of my essential freedom !

SIR RALPH, pleased, patronising.

The exercise, say, of your characteristic genius ! (Then after an instant.) In return for this relief I should be willing to entertain the idea of (hesitating a moment) a formal acknowledgment.

BERNAL, vague.

A formal acknowledgment ?

SIR RALPH.

Pecuniary ! (Complacent.) You may paint my portrait.

BERNAL.

Delighted. You're a great subject !

SIR RALPH.

But not for a thousand.

BERNAL, smiling.

For how much ?

SIR RALPH, debating an instant ; then with the same complacency.

For a hundred.

BERNAL, with the same good-humour.

For a hundred. (Then while GRACE JESMOND reappears.) When will you sit ?

Re-enter GRACE JESMOND from the library, with more addressed and stamped letters.

SIR RALPH, privately, with intensity, to BERNAL.

"Sit ?" I can only run ! Cover my retreat !

Exit Sir RALPH hastily to the right.

GRACE, eager ; keeping her letters.

Did Mr. Bedford know you ?

BERNAL, smiling, kind.

I think I was mysterious to him—very much as you are to *me* ! (Then after an instant.) Are you greatly attached to him ?

GRACE.

He has been good to me. I've been of use to him, and this beautiful place has been my home.

BERNAL.

Shall you leave it—after this?

GRACE.

Naturally I shall leave it. With regret!

BERNAL.

And where shall you go?

GRACE.

I don't know, Mr. Bernal, where I shall go.

BERNAL.

Have you no friends?

GRACE.

We don't know what friends we have till we test them.

BERNAL.

And have you none of yours whom you've tested?

GRACE, smiling.

I give people the benefit of doubts!

BERNAL.

Don't be too fond of doubts. Try a little confidence!

GRACE.

I daresay I shall have to from this time. You must set me the example!

BERNAL.

Is there anything I can do for you—offer you?

GRACE, as if much touched, but smiling, and with a certain gentle mockery.
You speak as if you were powerful!

BERNAL.

You do right to take me up on it. My situation is preposterous—there's indeed no service I can render.

GRACE.

Your situation will change—and then you'll become conscious of your power.

BERNAL.

Even if I do, I don't think I shall believe in it. The only thing I've ever believed in is my freedom!

GRACE, after an instant.

Is freedom very sweet?

BERNAL.

Have you never known it?

GRACE.

Perhaps I shall know it now.

BERNAL.

If I lose mine, I shall take a tremendous interest in yours.

GRACE.

You're very kind—but you'll lose nothing. The best freedom is to be rich !

BERNAL.

Why are you so bent, Miss Jesmond, on my being "rich" ?

GRACE, with genuine intensity.

Because it costs me too much, here, to-day, to believe you're too late !

BERNAL, gallant.

Never too late when in time to see *you* ! (Then as Lady BASSET reappears.) And the rest of this wonderful company !

Re-enter Lady BASSET from the outer hall, again fully equipped for departure.

LADY BASSET, eager.

Sir Ralph's not here ?

BERNAL.

He's with our cousin.

LADY BASSET, in the same manner.

The will's made ?

GRACE.

The will's made.

LADY BASSET.

And what does he get?

GRACE, after an instant.

He gets everything!

Re-enter MAUD VANNECK from the outer hall.

LADY BASSET, in the excitement and effusion of the news; inadvertent,
to MAUD.

He gets everything!

Re-enter TEDDY ASHDOWN, dressed to go, with the two bags.

MAUD, excited.

Everything? (Then passing on the news to TEDDY.) He gets
everything!

TEDDY, staring.

Everything?

MAUD, enthusiastic.

Everything!

LADY BASSET, re-echoing, jubilant.

Everything!

Re-enter from the right, as she speaks, Sir RALPH DAMANT, pale and grave,
who pauses in the doorway at the sight and sound of these demonstrations,
with outstretched, warning, commanding hands.

SIR RALPH, with stern authority.

Ladies and gentlemen, we're in a house of mourning.
Our generous host and kinsman has passed away!

ACT SECOND

MARK BERNAL'S studio, Vandyke Lodge, Chelsea ; a bare, impecunious, but more or less shabbily-picturesque room, furnished with odds and ends and with various signs of a roving past, hand-to-mouth, picnicking habits and a Bohemian manner of life : not vulgar, however ; only unconventional and casual. The right side is occupied by the high glazed studio north-light. At the centre, toward the right, the door to the so-called parlour. At the centre, toward the left, the door to street, opening first into a small vestibule. Down on the left the door to the kitchen and the pantry. Under the big window an old faded, battered Chippendale sofa. Down on the left an old-fashioned but dilapidated "property" chair with a small table beside it. Up at the centre, between the two doors, a bare chimney-piece with an unframed picture above it and a table covered with an ancient, damaged piece of brocade in front. Half-way down on the right, with its face to the light, a large easel with a big new canvas set up on it, and a stand beside it with a colour-box and implements. Down on the left a smaller easel with a smaller canvas. Watercolour sketches and charcoal drawings are tacked on the walls ; several old and new canvases are stacked together on the floor. On stools, chairs and promiscuous pieces of furniture are scattered in confusion various articles of apparel and homely domestic utensils. The air of the whole place disgarnished and makeshift.

The stage is unoccupied till the bell from the street-door, suspended within sight, tinkles on its old relaxed spring. At the sound of the bell TEDDY ASHDOWN hurries out of the parlour, carrying the retarded breakfast-things on an extemporised tray.

TEDDY, flurried, in extreme dishabille, only his shirt and trousers, without a necktie.

A sitter? Sir Ralph, by Jove ! (Scuttling down to the kitchen

with the tray.) And nothing washed up! (Disappears momentarily into the kitchen, where the crash of crockery hurriedly set down is heard while the bell again, in the studio, more sharply tinkles. TEDDY emerging, more excited, looks about among the scattered garments for something more to put on.) I'm scarce "washed-up" myself, and (while he catches up a pair of braces and fastens them behind) certainly not dressed-up! (While the bell sounds a third time he reaches and opens the street-door. Then surprised as Lady BASSET is disclosed.) Lady Basset!

Enter Lady BASSET.

LADY BASSET, equally surprised.

I find *you* in possession?

TEDDY, his braces dangling behind.

Sadly uncontested—unless you've come for your portrait!

LADY BASSET, while she looks anxiously round her.

I've come for Sir Ralph Damant's—knowing his intention to sit.

TEDDY.

He hasn't sat, worse luck! We're waiting.

LADY BASSET.

You too? What have you to do with it?

TEDDY.

I'm employed by Mr. Bernal.

LADY BASSET, looking at him up and down with extreme disapproval.
Employed—as a model?

TEDDY, vague ; then amusedly taking the hint.

You mean for the—undraped? No, I don't pose—except to our creditors!

LADY BASSET, with visible rigour.

Have they left you nothing to put on?

TEDDY, feverishly looking.

Plenty—if I can only find it! (Then when, after buttoning his braces, he has laid his hands on a waistcoat, a jacket, and a necktie.) Reduced by a parent's rigour to a mere miscellaneous wardrobe, I've fallen back on my artistic nature.

LADY BASSET, struck, emphatic

Just what I've fallen back on!

TEDDY.

Mr. Bernal had been so kind to me in those agitated hours at Courtlands that I ventured to come to see him. I feel I've a little gift that only requires direction.

LADY BASSET, encouraged.

Exactly what I feel! (Resolute.) He shall also direct mine!—He's out?

TEDDY.

He'll be back in a moment. He kindly puts me up.

LADY BASSET, struck ; then eager.

Does he *board* his pupils?

TEDDY.

On the lowest terms!

LADY BASSET.

I shall discuss them with him.

TEDDY, *surprised*.

Do you wish him to put *you* up?

LADY BASSET.

In order to be present at the sittings.

TEDDY, *vague*.

The sittings?

LADY BASSET.

That Sir Ralph has promised to give. To watch the painter's method.

TEDDY, *after an instant*.

Ain't you afraid he may watch yours?

LADY BASSET.

I have none. I'm a creature of inspiration.

TEDDY.

But while you're abandoned to your inspiration what will become of dear Maud?

LADY BASSET.

I've thrown her up. (*After an instant.*) Dear Maud's at large!

TEDDY, *alert*.

Then I may enjoy her?

LADY BASSET.

When did I ever prevent you?

TEDDY, recollecting, conceding.

You did give a fellow a chance!

LADY BASSET, with abrupt and winning familiarity.

Then let a fellow give *me* one! (Appealing sociably.) Back me up! (Then after an instant.) I've come to stay! (Eager, as the street-door opens.) Here he is! (Then disconcerted, disappointed, as MARK BERNAL appears: enter MARK BERNAL from the street.) Oh!

TEDDY, to BERNAL.

She's come to stay!

BERNAL, in informal but recognisable mourning; coming down, gay, gallant, to Lady BASSET.

That's a note of defiance. We *never* release the fair!

TEDDY.

She wants to study your method.

BERNAL, to Lady BASSET.

Of dealing with the fair?

LADY BASSET, flattered, arch.

That I know too well! (After an instant.) Of dealing with the timid!

BERNAL, sociable, encouraging, moving a chair.

I begin with asking them to be seated.

LADY BASSET, taking the seat.

I'm not speaking of myself—I'm speaking of Sir Ralph.

BERNAL, eager.

You've brought him *with* you?

LADY BASSET, alarmed.

Brought him? Won't he come of himself?

BERNAL, unscrupulously amiable.

He would if he knew you were here! (Then, as with a happy thought, to TEDDY.) I say—go and tell him!

TEDDY, vague.

This moment?

BERNAL.

At his noble mansion in Portland Place.

LADY BASSET, staring.

Has he moved to Portland Place?

BERNAL.

With his great new wealth!

LADY BASSET, rueful.

While I've been writing to his chambers!

BERNAL, prompt, plausible.

That's why you've had no answer! He has now set up a palace.

LADY BASSET, much impressed.

A palace?

BERNAL, laughing.

Perhaps I should say a fortress !

LADY BASSET, considering, politic, to TEDDY.

Don't go—I'll wait !

BERNAL.

He must go for the beer. ' (Very friendly, to Lady BASSET.) If you consent to share our fortunes, you'll perhaps share our refreshment !

LADY BASSET, looking at him ; tenderly significant.

I'll pretend so—to be alone with you !

BERNAL, responsive, smiling.

I delight to be alone with *you* ! (To TEDDY.) Have you any money ?

TEDDY.

No ; have you ?

BERNAL.

Look in the teacup. (To Lady BASSET, while TEDDY goes up to the chimney-piece.) The teacup's our bank—a bank that's always breaking !

TEDDY, accidentally, as he reaches up for the cup, knocking it over and smashing it.

It's broke now !

BERNAL, as he looks at the fragments ; good-humoured.

Naturally—with nothing *in* it ! Won't they trust me ?

LADY BASSET, with renewed archness.

They're wiser than I, Mr. Bernal! (Then to TEDDY, with her hand in her pocket.) But here's a shilling—to get rid of you! (To BERNAL, as TEDDY accepts the shilling and he protests with a gesture.) I'll take it out in lessons.

TEDDY, who has picked up his hat; at the street door, to BERNAL.

I told her your terms were low!

Exit TEDDY to the street.

BERNAL, struck, as if with a happy thought.

Do you desire a course of instruction?

LADY BASSET, simpering.

I feel I've a little gift that only requires direction.

BERNAL, amused, encouraging.

Your little gifts are profuse! (Then as he picks up the morsels of the teacup.) If I form a school (cheerful, hopeful) I can go in for a little jug with a slit! (Having put away the pieces.) You're a messenger from heaven—we're living on hopes!

LADY BASSET, vague.

Hopes of what?

BERNAL.

Of bread and butter. Of my cousin's arrival, and his splendid pose. (With the vivid artistic vision—a flourish of his hand before his eyes.) I see his pose already!

LADY BASSET, with the same flourish.

So do I!

BERNAL, with sudden ruefulness.

But what I don't see yet is the "honorarium"!

LADY BASSET.

Is it to be so heavy?

BERNAL.

A hundred pounds—the Millennium. (Sad.) The Millennium never comes!

LADY BASSET, reassuring.

I'm not the Golden Age, no doubt; but I'll pay every week.

BERNAL, gallant.

Dear lady, you pay every minute! (Then jovial, making his preparations for her lesson, drawing out the smaller easel.) Oh, I shall get on—Teddy saves me a butler.

LADY BASSET, as she draws off her gloves, smiling at him engagingly.
What shall I save you?

BERNAL, after an instant; rising to the occasion.

The pursuit of lovely woman—if I may worship her at home!

LADY BASSET, warningly, with arch-prudery.

You must speak to me only of Art—for in Art there is no Impropriety!

BERNAL, gay.

I quite understand that if there were, you'd never have entered (indicating with amused irony his shabby surroundings) this dedicated temple! (Reassuring.) It's a ground on which we may meet with perfect delicacy! (Then after placing a drawing-board on the smaller easel) What's the nature of your talent?

LADY BASSET, rising.

The nature? (Thinking, while he helps her off with her jacket; then with effusion.) Sincere!

BERNAL, giving her a charcoal study of his own.

Then copy that head—it's nice and fresh!

LADY BASSET, with the head, examining it.

I must do it, you know, as I *feel* it!

BERNAL, anxious.

Don't "feel" it too much—it may come off! (Then, as she has put the sketch on a rest near the easel and seated herself) Do you mind if I change my coat?

LADY BASSET, seated at the easel, beginning her work from the sketch.
Don't we agree that in Art there is no Impropriety?

BERNAL, amused, while he puts on an old black velveteen jacket taken down from a nail on which he has suspended his other coat.

I don't change it for "Art"—I change it for economy.
Do you mind if I smoke a pipe?

LADY BASSET, very vivacious, while she works.

Do you mind if I do?

BERNAL.

Alas, we've only two, and Teddy has the other! (Then behind her, overlooking her start, while he stuffs and lights his pipe)
Haven't you got the head awfully in the corner?

LADY BASSET, leaning back, with her own head very much on one side.
That's how I feel it!

BERNAL, amused, resigned, going over to his own easel.

You feel it in a funny place !

LADY BASSET, working.

My talent's intensely personal.

BERNAL.

Forgive me if my remarks are !

LADY BASSET.

Absorbed in my inspiration, I become a monster of indifference. (Then after a fit of rubbing her work and falling back, while BERNAL lifts the big blank canvas off his easel, stands it against the wall and prepares something he can go on with.) What on earth *does* keep him ?

BERNAL, preoccupied, standing at his easel.

Teddy, with that blessed beer ?

LADY BASSET, in attitudes.

Sir Ralph—the false, the faithless !

BERNAL, painting.

He's paralysed by his prudence.

LADY BASSET.

He may indeed have been prudent with *me*, but I can't pretend he has been paralysed. I've had startling glimpses of his passion !

BERNAL.

Don't build on his passion—it's hollow.

LADY BASSET, uneasy, getting up.

Hollow?

BERNAL, seating himself at his easel as she leaves her place.

Inane—insane. Fate has marked him to stand alone!

LADY BASSET, alarmed, protesting.

Alone?

BERNAL, with great sincerity, as he works.

He's so rich, so brilliant, so gifted, that he's condemned to a splendid solitude. He sees all men as sordid—he sees all women as venal. A cruel doom has forbidden him to believe in human affection.

LADY BASSET.

And do *you* believe in it?

BERNAL, leaving his easel, smiling.

I think it's my only faith! And I've one thing that he hasn't—the freedom to cultivate it!

LADY BASSET.

You've cultivated it in vain, since—like him!—you stand alone.

BERNAL.

Alone? Not a bit—with *you* here!

LADY BASSET.

You're evidently afraid to marry.

BERNAL.

You're quite mistaken. Try me!

LADY BASSET, startled, vague.

“Try” you?

BERNAL, cheerful, encouraging.

Propose—and you’ll see! (Then laughing, as she gives a shocked gesture.) They do to Ralph!

LADY BASSET, struck, assenting.

Dear Maud has done it, I know! (Then after an instant) And I strongly suspect Miss Jesmond.

BERNAL, wondering.

Miss Jesmond?

LADY BASSET.

I know she has proposed to others!

BERNAL, after an instant.

Well—she has been refused all round!

LADY BASSET, struck again, alarmed, seizing his arm.

Do you suppose she has got him now?

BERNAL, vague, just wondering again.

Now?

LADY BASSET, with a sudden vision of the truth, while TEDDY ASHDOWN reappears: re-enter TEDDY ASHDOWN precipitately, with his tankard of beer, from the street, leaving the door open behind him.

That creature keeps him away!

TEDDY, as he comes down with his beer and Lady BASSET turns back to her work; privately and excitedly to BERNAL.

He’s come! he’s come: his footman’s looking for the house!

BERNAL, startled ; then, as if abruptly confessing, with great urgency and plausibility, to Lady BASSET.

Teddy announces a model !

LADY BASSET, agitated.

A female ?

TEDDY.

The sort of thing you thought *I* was !

LADY BASSET, hesitating.

For the figure ?

BERNAL, assenting, smiling.

But not a female. (Then, on a gesture of Lady BASSET's ; as if out of consideration for her delicacy) Will you retire to the parlour ?

LADY BASSET, considering, as if to measure the full bearings of the situation ; then majestically catching up her jacket ; to protect her purity.

I'll retire ! (At the door of the parlour, which TEDDY has opened for her ; resolute.) I've come to stay !

Exit Lady BASSET.

BERNAL, urgent, to TEDDY.

Stay *with* her ! (Exit TEDDY ASHDOWN to the parlour, while BERNAL eagerly meets Sir RALPH, who appears in the open doorway. Enter Sir RALPH DAMANT from the street.) You've come to sit ?

SIR RALPH, in deep, distinguished mourning ; visibly and unfavourably impressed by his cousin's Bohemian accessories.

Do you consider there's anything to sit on ?

BERNAL, laughing.

Some of the chairs have legs, and some have backs—

SIR RALPH, as he looks critically round.

But none have both ! (Then checking BERNAL gravely in the movement to provide him with a seat.) There are preliminaries—conditions.

BERNAL, arrested but amused.

Why, I thought we had settled them at Courtlands !

SIR RALPH, after an instant.

Do you mean the sum to be paid ?

BERNAL.

Paid, my dear Ralph (hesitating, smiling) as soon as you're so very good as to pay it !

SIR RALPH, surprised and as if resenting his avidity.

How can I pay it before I judge of the likeness ?

BERNAL.

How can you judge of the likeness before I've a chance to catch it ? (Laughing.) "First catch your hare !"

SIR RALPH.

Your images make me shudder !—all the more that (thanks to the rigour of my mourning !) I've enjoyed for a while a period of exemption from the chase. Now that I've quitted my retreat—

BERNAL.

It's only to remind me of that charming feature of our contract—

SIR RALPH.

Your guarantee of safety— !

BERNAL, interrupting again in turn ; good-humoured.

And resemblance ! So that it's not till I hand you these commodities—

SIR RALPH.

Over the counter, as it were, that I hand *you* a hundred pounds !

BERNAL, disappointed, but trying to be cheerful ; about to lay his hands gaily on Sir Ralph, as if to put him in position.

The attitude's found—I'll do you in the act !

SIR RALPH, struck, approving.

And call the picture "The Patron of Art," or "The Friend in Need" ? Before I can throw myself into that character with the requisite calm, I've a deep anxiety to allay.

BERNAL, impatient.

Another ?

SIR RALPH.

There's *always* another ! How have you disposed of Miss Jesmond ?

BERNAL, blank.

Disposed of her ? Not at all !

SIR RALPH, displeased.

Then you *don't* carry out our bargain ?

BERNAL.

Such a bargain as that? It takes three to make it! I haven't seen the tip of her nose.

SIR RALPH, wondering, grave.

She's lying low?

BERNAL, raising and dropping his arms; irresponsible.

She has vanished from my ken!

SIR RALPH, reflecting.

She's laying a train.

BERNAL.

Then it's a very long one! You remember when she quitted Courtlands?

SIR RALPH, assenting.

The day of her patron's death.

BERNAL, with a certain veiled, sarcastic bitterness.

His patronage had limits—as appeared by his will!

SIR RALPH, after an instant.

Do you allude to his overlooking you?

BERNAL.

To his overlooking *her*.

SIR RALPH.

She had five years of pickings.

BERNAL.

Do you mean that she still has resources ?

SIR RALPH, with the same serenity.

Her character—which is unmistakable—supplies them in abundance.

BERNAL, after an instant ; as if thinking this over.

If you haven't seen her, how should I ?

SIR RALPH.

You were so grossly indiscreet as to boast to her of my order.

BERNAL, smiling.

Forgive my natural pride ! But if she has found no pretext for approaching you—

SIR RALPH, interrupting.

I tremble at every ring ! (Then with a violent start, as the bell of the street-door sounds out) There she is ! (To himself, seeing TEDDY burst out of the parlour to answer the bell : re-enter TEDDY ASHDOWN from the parlour) And there *he* is ! (Then to BERNAL, while TEDDY passes to the street-door ; quickly moving to the parlour) Let me escape !

BERNAL, alarmed, catching, intercepting him, while TEDDY opens the street-door and MAUD VANNECK appears.

Not there !

Enter MAUD VANNECK from the street.

TEDDY, welcoming MAUD ; delighted.

So jolly of you to look a fellow up !

SIR RALPH, relieved, but still highly disgusted.

Permit me to dissent from that !

TEDDY, explaining her to the others.

Lady Basset chucks her.

MAUD, cheerful.

But I can face the usual dangers !

SIR RALPH.

That's more, madam, than *I* can do ! (Then aside to BERNAL, while MAUD allows TEDDY joyfully to divest her of her jacket and feather boa)
I leave the house !

BERNAL, genuinely distressed.

Where'll you go ?

SIR RALPH, thinking ; with dignity.

I'll drive on the Embankment.

BERNAL, urgent.

And you'll come back— ?

SIR RALPH, at the street-door.

When you've worked her off !

Exit Sir RALPH.

MAUD, disconcerted ; with compunction.

I've driven Sir Ralph away !

TEDDY.

What do you want of Sir Ralph when you've got a fellow like me ?

BERNAL, impatient.

She has got nothing of the sort, Teddy. You'll please to return to your studies.

TEDDY, resenting this decree, with injured dignity.

If you didn't take me, Mr. Bernal, for nothing—

BERNAL, good-humoured, gay.

I should take you for a dangerous rival! And on the mere chance I banish you!

TEDDY, at the door to the parlour.

When I can I'll pay you!

Exit TEDDY ASHDOWN.

BERNAL, to MAUD.

To what do I owe the honour of your visit?

MAUD.

Abandoned by my natural protectors, I've fallen back on my artistic nature. I feel I've a little gift that only requires direction.

BERNAL, eager.

You enter my school?

MAUD, reluctant, indicating the parlour.

Do you mean *that* place?

BERNAL.

It's there that I hold my class!

MAUD.

But where do you paint Sir Ralph?

BERNAL, disconcerted.

Did I tell you too I was to paint him?

MAUD.

Miss Jesmond told me—at Courtlands. You know we came away together.

BERNAL, alert.

Where did Miss Jesmond go?

MAUD.

She came to London.

BERNAL.

And where is she now?

MAUD, with asperity.

I haven't the least idea! (Then more persuasive.) You must let me see you at work.

BERNAL.

At work on Sir Ralph? You mustn't let me see *you*!

MAUD, after an instant; arch.

Do you fear him too as a rival?

BERNAL, blank.

A rival?

MAUD.

Isn't that what you call Mr. Ashdown?

BERNAL.

As a manner of speaking! If I fear my cousin as a rival, it's as a rival to Teddy. (After an instant, coaxing.) I should like much better to see you at work on *him*! He's a fine little chap, is Teddy.

MAUD, impatient.

Dear Mr. Bernal, I don't want a fine little chap. I want a man of the world—and a man of means. I want social distinction. I want (thinking; then with vain emphasis) oh, I want a lot of things!

BERNAL.

Yes; you all want a lot of things. I should think it would be enough to want a little thing called happiness!

MAUD.

But happiness depends on such a lot!

BERNAL.

Does yours depend on your bringing down Sir Ralph?

MAUD, after an instant.

You're awfully vulgar, you know! (Then after another instant.) Do you believe I *can*?

BERNAL.

I believe almost any woman can experiment successfully on almost any man.

MAUD, eager.

Make him love her?

BERNAL.

Yes—and make him hate her for doing it! You're young, you're pretty, you're clever—

MAUD, interrupting, complacent.

And I've had the Higher Education!

BERNAL, smiling.

The Higher, but not the Highest! (Then more gravely, but very kindly.) The education of unselfish affection! (Pleading, sociably, tenderly.) Think a little more of that, and a little less of baubles and baronets! Don't misapply your gifts; don't pervert your youth; don't harden your heart. (After an instant.) Don't try to get on without love!

MAUD, as if struck, incipiently charmed, by his appeal.

Have *you* tried?

BERNAL.

Not for a single hour! I've loved, though I've lost! So, bare as you see me here, I dispense with a lot of things. I'm rich in faith.

MAUD.

Faith in what?

BERNAL.

In the present woman—whoever she is!

MAUD.

And what do you do about the absent?

BERNAL, laughing.

I don't recognise the absent. She's always the loser !

MAUD, after an instant.

If I were to marry you I think I'd look after you !

BERNAL.

I want some one awfully to look after me.

MAUD.

With such a person, and (looking rather compassionately round her) such a home, you'd enter upon a union—?

BERNAL, prompt.

In a moment—in Teddy's place !

MAUD, disconcerted, called back to reality while the bell of the street-door rings.

Oh, Teddy's— !

Re-enter TEDDY ASHDOWN precipitately from the parlour.

BERNAL.

Teddy's place is to answer the bell.

MAUD, eager, while TEDDY goes to the door.

Sir Ralph back ?

TEDDY, opening the street-door, announcing, exclaiming.

Dear old Miss Jesmond !

Enter GRACE JESMOND.

BERNAL, with astonishment and alacrity, meeting her.

Miss Jesmond !

GRACE, who has paused an instant, as if, at the sight of MAUD, with a last irrepressible hesitation.

I had your address.

BERNAL, rejoicing.

How jolly—it was in that book !

TEDDY, sociable, ingenuous.

Oh yes, in that book !

GRACE, pale, tired, appreciably altered ; in simple, economical mourning ; addressing TEDDY very kindly, but markedly as if to check him.

I'm glad to find you, Mr. Ashdown.

MAUD, who on GRACE's entrance has passed in visible displeasure to the sofa under the window, where she has seated herself ; hearing this.

Mr. Ashdown ! (TEDDY hurries over to her and talks with her.)

BERNAL, to GRACE, in frank wonderment and appreciation.

You've put on mourning—when he left you nothing ?

GRACE, at the left, gravely indicating his own garb while she sinks upon the other sofa.

What did he leave *you* ? (Then as BERNAL, with a motion as of cheerful, resigned dismissal of the subject, places himself beside her.) I've come to see you (after an instant) on account of your profession.

BERNAL, struck, amused.

You too have a little gift— ?

GRACE, vague.

A little gift ?

BERNAL, laughing.

That only requires direction !

GRACE, smiling sadly.

I'm afraid I've no gift at all—that's exactly why I've come. (After an instant.) I must find employment.

BERNAL, vague.

As an amanuensis ?

GRACE.

I've tried for that—in vain.

BERNAL, sympathetic.

Nobody wants one ?

GRACE, with the same sad smile ; discouraged, resigned.

Everybody *has* one !

BERNAL, smiling.

I haven't, Miss Jesmond ; but on the other hand—

GRACE, as he pauses.

You've so little correspondence ?

BERNAL.

I fear it's of a sort (after an instant, laughing) not to be deputed to another.

GRACE.

It's not with that idea that I've ventured to approach

you. (Then after a supreme hesitation.) You're the only artist I happen to know—and I've come to suggest myself as a model.

BERNAL, wonderstruck.

A model ?

MAUD, overhearing, rising ; to TEDDY.

A model ? (Then as she seizes the idea ; with emphatic compunction.) That's what *I* ought to have done !

TEDDY, on his feet, equally struck, delighted.

It's not too late—will you sit to *me* ? (Then eager, to BERNAL, indicating MAUD.) May she sit to me ?

BERNAL, rising, struck, thinking an instant ; then happy to adopt the suggestion.

Certainly—in the parlour !

TEDDY, disconcerted, objecting.

With Lady Basset ?

MAUD, astonished.

Lady Basset ?

TEDDY, explaining.

She's the Second Pupil.

BERNAL, insistent.

The Second Pupil must have the same advantages as the First ! Therefore (settling the matter, to MAUD) you must sit to both of them !

MAUD, majestic and sarcastic, looking at GRACE.

While Miss Jesmond sits to *you* ?

BERNAL, after an instant, gay.

Miss Jesmond's professional !

MAUD, at this, gives a shocked gesture and, as if retiring to avoid some indecorous exhibition, goes up with TEDDY, who ushers and follows her into the parlour while BERNAL returns to GRACE.

GRACE, who during this discussion has sat motionless, only with her eyes attentively wandering over the tell-tale indications of the place.

Not yet—but I really want to be !

BERNAL, on the sofa again.

You're quite without resources ?

GRACE, very simple.

Quite without resources.

BERNAL.

You've never been able to save ?

GRACE.

I've a sister (after an instant) whom I help. Her husband's dying—she has children—she has troubles. So you see I must do something—and do it soon. There are people I've seen, in past years, at Courtlands—it's to those people I've been. It was at Courtlands I saw *you*—and it's to you I come last. (After a moment.) I've been to shops, first. I've been told to come again—and I've gone again. But it's the same everywhere—there's nothing to be had. It occurred to me at last that I had heard of girls who earn money—however little!—by

sitting to painters ; sitting for the head, the hair, the hands, for—what do you call it?—the “type” : in story-book attitudes, in short-waisted frocks, in old faded Kate Greenaway dresses. So I thought there might be a demand (smiling again) and that I might—with a little patience!—do something to meet it. I’m perhaps not clumsier—nor uglier!—than some. I’m willing to try hard, to do my best ; and if it’s only a question of keeping still—oh, I can do that : so still—*so* still ! (Then after an instant, brave, simple.) Anything to boil the pot !

BERNAL, who has listened intently.

Your idea’s ingenious—but is there nothing else you can do ?

GRACE.

I’ve hunted up and down for a month. And the only definite thing I’ve found is how many others are hunting—a thousand partners in the chase !

BERNAL, laughing.

Diana and all her nymphs ! So you’ve kindly come to me—?

GRACE.

In my ignorance of the next best step.

BERNAL, very kind.

It’s a cruel change—from your life at Courtlands.

GRACE.

Do you remember you told me at Courtlands that freedom is sweet ? (After an instant.) I’m tasting its sweetness !

BERNAL, after a moment.

I wish I could assist you !

GRACE, with extreme but suppressed apprehension.

I'm *not* the "type"? I've not the appearance—?

BERNAL, abrupt.

You've the appearance, Miss Jesmond, of an angel !

GRACE, rising quickly ; concluding.

But you've simply no present use for me !

BERNAL, rising ; then with the artist's gesture of evocation.

I see you perfectly—I place you—I catch you. But
(with a sad smile and a slow head-shake) I lose you again !

GRACE, looking vaguely about.

Of course you've plenty of people. (Then after an instant.) Do
you happen to know some painter—?

BERNAL, falling in, thinking.

Who would be ready for such a sitter? There isn't a
fellow in London who wouldn't rejoice in the chance !
(Then feeling his pockets for a notebook ; looking round for something to write
on.) I'll give you the best addresses.

GRACE, as he comes down again, finding nothing.

You're looking for notepaper ?

BERNAL, embarrassed, ashamed ; still looking.

We had a sheet—last week ! (Then blushing, conscious, smiling,
while he confesses his destitution.) You're not in a land of plenty !

GRACE, looking at him an instant, then abruptly drawing the sketchbook of
Act First from under her mantle.

Write in that.

BERNAL, recognising gaily his book.

My album—you've brought it back?

GRACE.

I've brought it back. (After an instant.) I thought you
might need it.

BERNAL, laughing, scribbling addresses on a leaf of the album.

You see I do!

GRACE, looking about the place again while he writes.

It's your only one?

BERNAL, writing, preoccupied, smiling.

My one ewe-lamb!

GRACE.

It was good of you to give it to me.

BERNAL, still writing.

Don't praise me—when I take it back!

GRACE, smiling.

I put you to special expenses!

BERNAL, tearing out of the album the leaf on which he has written; folding
and giving it to her.

You see I stagger beneath them!

GRACE, with the paper, which she slowly puts into her portemonnaie.
But I also see you have pupils.

BERNAL, smiling.
I take them for nothing.

GRACE.
You're too generous. (Then after a moment.) But you've
had orders.

BERNAL.
For portraits? I've had one, thank heaven!

GRACE, after another moment.
From Sir Ralph Damant?

BERNAL, struck.
You knew it?

GRACE.
You told me at Courtlands. (Then as he gives a lively gesture of
recollection.) You've had no other?

BERNAL, philosophic.
No other.

GRACE.
Is Sir Ralph finished?

BERNAL.
He's not begun. He begins to-day.

GRACE, as if definitely influenced by this; thinking.
To-day?

BERNAL, noticing her interest in the question ; attentive.

He comes to sit—you may meet him.

GRACE, considering, assenting.

I see—I may meet him.

BERNAL, laughing.

He may meet *you* !

GRACE, who has moved away an instant, and once more has turned her eyes over the room ; speaking at last, as she faces him again, abruptly.

Mr. Bernal—are you very poor ?

BERNAL.

Do you suppose if I were not I would decline your splendid offer ? The stupid, sordid truth, Miss Jesmond, is that I can't *afford* a model !

GRACE, grave.

I see. (Then with infinite gentleness.) I'm very sorry.

BERNAL.

You can't be sorrier than I ! It was awfully nice of you to come ; but you've brought your empty pitcher to a thirsty land !

GRACE, after an instant.

You're as poor as I am ?

BERNAL.

You make me feel much poorer ! And it's the first time my condition has seemed to me (bringing out the word with expression, resentment) ugly !

GRACE.

It's the first time mine has seemed to me endurable!
(Then as she visibly lingers, delays to go, takes another survey of the studio.)
Do you live without—comfort?

BERNAL, laughing.

With such comfort as you behold!

GRACE, taking out again the paper he has given her.

And these artists are rich?

BERNAL.

They're richer. Do try them!

GRACE, looking at the list.

I'll try them. (Then still stationary, with the list in her hand.) It's
your cousin's hour?

BERNAL.

It's my cousin's hour.

GRACE.

Then I suppose I ought to go.

BERNAL, after a moment.

Your time of course is limited.

GRACE, continuing to twist her paper nervously, without any movement of
departure.

My necessity indeed presses. (Then after an instant.) From
the moment my business is over—

BERNAL, smiling, as she vaguely pauses.

You've no reason to stay?

GRACE.

None I can conveniently express. (Smiling.) I'm not, like Miss Vanneck, a pupil.

BERNAL, laughing.

Nor like my Lady Basset! (After an instant.) *They* can express their reason!

GRACE, as if thinking what this can be; then bringing it out

Sir Ralph Damant?

BERNAL.

They want to corner him!

GRACE, looking down while she speaks.

To "corner" him?

BERNAL.

To marry him!

GRACE, after an instant.

Both?

BERNAL, laughing.

Both!

GRACE.

And they're waiting for him?

BERNAL.

They're waiting for him!

GRACE, after an instant, smiling, but as if thinking.

I won't, then.

BERNAL, pretendingly jocular.

You'll call on him at home?

GRACE, with her eyes on him a moment in silence.

Where does he live?

BERNAL.

Portland Place, 130.

GRACE.

Thank you. (Then looking again at her list.) If these gentlemen employ me—

BERNAL, emphatical but sad, as she pauses.

You'll be so taken up that I shall never see you again!

GRACE, who has finally, wearily put away her paper and gathered her mantle round her.

Good-bye, Mr. Bernal.

BERNAL, after an instant.

Good-bye, Miss Jesmond.

GRACE, turns away from him as if to move to the door, taking as she does so a supreme look round. Then suddenly, in this act, she falters, totters slightly, raises her hand to her head, as if faint or giddy, with an ejaculation of distress.

Ah!

BERNAL, moving, anxious, quick, to her assistance.

You're ill?

GRACE, reaching out to support herself.

I'm faint !

BERNAL, catching, sustaining her

You're exhausted—you're quite done !

GRACE, panting, trying to recover herself, while Lady BASSET reappears.

Walking over London—since breakfast !

Re-enter Lady BASSET from the parlour.

LADY BASSET, stopping short, arrested, scandalised by the sight of BERNAL closely holding, apparently embracing, GRACE.

Mr. Bernal, what on earth are you doing ?

BERNAL, startled, while he quickly separates from GRACE ; embarrassed, but smiling and plausibly explaining.

Setting up my model !

LADY BASSET.

Your model ? (Then struck, inspired, looking from one of them to the other.) I've come in to tell you that my little gift requires more direction than you seem to have time for. So, with leisure on my hands, why shouldn't I perform that function ?

BERNAL.

Sit for me—in character ? (Gay.) You'd come expensive

LADY BASSET, who is divested of her hat and is now essentially arranged to "stay" ; prompt.

Let it not be a question of money. I'll do it for love !

GRACE, gathering herself together again with a wan smile for BERNAL.
Profit by such a chance. Good-bye !

BERNAL, doubly reluctant now to let her go ; seizing a pretext for detaining and refreshing her.

You've had nothing since breakfast? Models have appetites ! (Bethinking himself, casting about.) They particularly depend on their tea.

LADY BASSET.

I particularly depend on mine !

BERNAL.

I think there *is* some—somewhere or other.

GRACE, pulling herself together.

Then I won't refuse it.

BERNAL, to Lady BASSET, invitingly, after he has quickly opened the door of the kitchen.

I daresay it's in there. There's something in the nature of a kettle— !

LADY BASSET, aloof, mindful only of her dignity and her clothes.
Shall I call Mr. Ashdown to make it boil?

GRACE, suddenly reviving, interposing, catching at the occasion to remain.
Let *me* make it boil ! (With a brightened smile.) I'm all right as soon as I work !

BERNAL, unwilling, protesting, while she eagerly unfastens her mantle.
Work? Not in your condition !

GRACE, quite gay.

Isn't it exactly what my condition wants? (Then while he has helped her off with her cloak and taken it from her.) I'll take off my hat! (Removing and giving it to him to put with the cloak.) And pin up the skirt of my only frock! (Turning up her dress till it shows half her petticoat, and passing BERNAL a pin.) Will *you* do it?

LADY BASSET, watching her with discomfiture as BERNAL fastens the skirt behind; to herself.

Why didn't I think of *that*?

BERNAL, vague, hopeful, to GRACE, who has reached the door of the kitchen. There *are* things—if you can make them out.

GRACE, who has taken her hat and jacket back from him; at the door. I'll make them out!

Exit GRACE JESMOND.

LADY BASSET.

Is there bread and butter?

BERNAL.

I've an earnest trust!

LADY BASSET, while GRACE reopens the door of the kitchen. And any little extra?

GRACE.

Mr. Bernal!

BERNAL, while he hurries to GRACE and TEDDY ASHDOWN reappears; addressing Lady BASSET from the door of the kitchen. I'll ascertain!

Exit MARK BERNAL. Re-enter TEDDY ASHDOWN from the parlour.

TEDDY, disconcerted, coming down.

Dear Maud won't sit !

LADY BASSET, preoccupied with her tea.

Is there any little extra ?

TEDDY, vague.

In the course of instruction ?

LADY BASSET.

In the course of recreation. (Indicating the kitchen.) They're making tea.

TEDDY.

Oh, we don't *have* little extras !

LADY BASSET.

I introduce a new system.

TEDDY, blank.

How in the world ?

LADY BASSET.

What have you done with my change ?

TEDDY.

From the beer ? (Pulling out a few coppers and looking at them in deprecation.) It ain't enough !

Re-enter MAUD VANNECK from the parlour.

LADY BASSET.

Miss Vanneck—contribute !

TEDDY, explaining, coaxing.

To the purchase of some little extra. (Then as MAUD, staring, gives a gesture of depressed destitution and the bell of the street-door sounds.)
It's Sir Ralph !

MAUD, while TEDDY hurries to the door.

Get the money from *him* !

Re-enter Sir RALPH by the door that TEDDY opens ; then stops in dismay at the sight of the two women.

LADY BASSET, instantly advancing upon him.

Will you give us half-a-crown ?

MAUD, engaging.

To buy some innocent relish.

SIR RALPH, bewildered, shocked.

Half-a-crown—for an innocent relish ? (Then as if considering.)
It's a monstrous price !

LADY BASSET, persuasive.

For a treat to Mr. Bernal ?

TEDDY.

He has nothing for tea !

SIR RALPH.

Nothing ? (As if reflecting, calculating, while he takes out his purse.)
Then I'll advance—two shillings.

Re-enter MARK BERNAL from the kitchen.

TEDDY, to MAUD, taking the money.

I'll be back in a moment !

Exit TEDDY ASHDOWN to the street.

SIR RALPH, to BERNAL.

There are two shillings to deduct.

BERNAL, amused.

I'll deduct them ! Shall I also deduct the ladies ?

LADY BASSET.

Never—till we've had our tea !

MAUD, seeing GRACE reappear.

Here it comes now !

Re-enter GRACE JESMOND with a tea-tray, teapot, cups and saucers.

SIR RALPH, to himself; still more discomfited and more aghast.

Miss Jesmond ! (Then, down on the right, resentful, to BERNAL, while GRACE sets the tray on the table before the chimney and the other ladies clear a place for it.) Where's your honour ?

BERNAL, vague.

My honour ?

SIR RALPH, indicating the women.

Your engagement.

BERNAL.

To absorb them ?

SIR RALPH.

To prevent their absorbing *me* !

BERNAL.

I *have* prevented it. They're making love to me !

SIR RALPH, dubious.

Miss Jesmond ?

BERNAL, after an instant, thinking.

I'm not so sure of Miss Jesmond.

SIR RALPH, peremptory.

Then what's she here for ? (As BERNAL hesitates.) She's here to make love to *me* !

BERNAL, after another instant.

I think you're hard on her.

SIR RALPH.

Didn't she know I was coming ?

BERNAL.

I admit she did.

SIR RALPH, triumphant.

Then it's proved !

BERNAL, affected by what Sir RALPH has said, worried and discomposed ;
watching GRACE an instant at the table with the other ladies ; then with a
nervous laugh.

Yes—it's "proved" ! (He goes uneasily up while Lady BASSET,
carrying a cup of tea, comes down to Sir RALPH.)

LADY BASSET.

A cup of tea, dear friend ?

SIR RALPH, taking the cup from her as if under uncanny coercion ;
looking at her in deep mistrust.

What have you put in it ?

LADY BASSET, beaming.

My gratitude, Sir Ralph !

SIR RALPH, guarded, blank.

Gratitude for what ?

LADY BASSET, secure.

The devotion you promised.

SIR RALPH, impatient.

Oh, damn the devotion !

LADY BASSET, resentful.

You withhold it ?

SIR RALPH, looking at her hard a moment ; then politic, accommodating.

To your very good health ! (He drains down the cup, under her eye, with submission, then hands it summarily back to her ; after which she goes up to put it down and MAUD descends on the other side with a plate of bread and butter.) She has drugged it ! (Then very sarcastic, as MAUD offers him her bread and butter.) What have I promised *you* ?

MAUD, sad, sentimental.

Nothing, alas !

SIR RALPH, turning unceremoniously away from her.

Then I decline your poison !

He crosses to the other side of the stage, as if to break with her for ever, and she, checked in her overture, discouraged, goes up again with her plate. TEDDY ASHDOWN meanwhile has re-entered from the street with his purchase, which he lays down on table before the others ; coming down immediately after to Sir RALPH.

TEDDY, giving Sir RALPH a sixpence and coppers.

The change.

SIR RALPH, looking at the money.

Elevenpence ?

TEDDY.

Tenpence !

He goes up while Sir RALPH pockets the money, and as he rejoins the others GRACE JESMOND, who has drunk her tea and turned away from the table, stands looking an instant at Sir RALPH. Then she comes down to him while BERNAL, who has noticed her movement, continues to observe her

GRACE, with veiled irony, to Sir RALPH.

Immensely graceful of you to sit !

SIR RALPH, with decision.

I shall *not* sit !—I object to the conditions !

GRACE, with repressed emotion.

You'll not keep faith ?

SIR RALPH.

It's *he* who has broken it !

GRACE.

I beg you to accept the conditions.

SIR RALPH.

Accept *you* as one of them ?

GRACE, feeling the impertinence, the insult of this ; then quickly controlling herself ; with a smile.

Am I one of the worst, Sir Ralph ?

SIR RALPH.

The worst for his job!

GRACE, considering.

I should be very sorry to injure Mr. Bernal.

SIR RALPH.

You do awfully, you know, by your conduct.

GRACE, still wondering.

In what manner can I modify it?

SIR RALPH.

By ceasing to spring up in my path!

GRACE, smiling.

I only spring up to check your retreat!

SIR RALPH, demurring to the term.

My "retreat"?

GRACE.

From your agreement to assist Mr. Bernal. (After an instant.) Mr. Bernal needs assistance.

SIR RALPH, curt, impatient.

Why on earth should he?

GRACE, indicating the whole place.

Look about you and see!

SIR RALPH, after a glance.

I see a lot of women!—Mark *likes* 'em! (Then after an instant.) I'll sit if he'll clear the place.

GRACE.

He will—of those ladies.

SIR RALPH, sharp.

But not of you?

GRACE.

If he turns me out he'll separate me— (Pausing, significantly hesitating.)

SIR RALPH.

Separate you—?

GRACE, smiling.

From you, Sir Ralph!

SIR RALPH.

That's exactly what I demand! (Turning away from her, he crosses to the other side of the stage.) I say, Mark! (Then on BERNAL'S coming down as GRACE goes up.) You'll have to take that girl by the shoulders! (On BERNAL'S blankness.) To put her out.

BERNAL, thinking, demurring, while he looks at Sir RALPH.

I'm more and more struck with her charm!

SIR RALPH, as if scandalised.

Her charm?

BERNAL.

Her spirit, her cleverness, her character! The more you've reason to dread her the more she needs my eye!

SIR RALPH.

Your eye can rest a bit. I let you off.

BERNAL.

It's a joy as well as a duty !

SIR RALPH.

Your joy should be to paint my portrait, and to clear the place for the purpose.

BERNAL, prompt.

I'll clear it ! (Then to the others.) As I must get to work with Sir Ralph I beg my pupils to retire !

LADY BASSET, resentful.

Without seeing your method ?

BERNAL, bending over her hand, kissing it in farewell.

This, dear lady, is my method ! (Then urging her up to the parlour with MAUD.) Put on your lovely things ! (Indicating all the tea-things.) Teddy, remove !

LADY BASSET, at door of the parlour ; to BERNAL.

Begin—while I dress !

Exit Lady BASSET.

MAUD, to Sir RALPH, at the door of parlour.

That takes her an hour !

Exit MAUD VANNECK, while TEDDY ASHDOWN, gathering up the tea-things, goes out with them to the kitchen and Sir RALPH, with bare patience, sits rigidly detached on the sofa under the window.

GRACE, to BERNAL.

Do you begin immediately?

SIR RALPH, resolute.

We don't begin till you've gone.

GRACE, to BERNAL.

Before I go I should like to speak to Sir Ralph.

SIR RALPH, rising in dismay.

Again, Madam?

GRACE, to BERNAL.

If you'll give me the fortunate chance.

BERNAL.

Do you mean alone?

GRACE, smiling.

I mean alone!

BERNAL, who has looked at her hard an instant; mystified, perplexed, tormented by everything that appears to give colour to Sir RALPH's account of her.

Shall I leave you, Ralph?

SIR RALPH, falling back helpless and hopeless on the sofa.

I meet my doom!

BERNAL, at the street-door, having taken up his hat and holding up an empty tube of oilcolour.

There's a chap next door—I'll borrow some blue!

Exit MARK BERNAL.

GRACE, who has taken up from the table where BERNAL has placed it after tearing out the leaf the album of Act First.

Allow me to ask (after an instant, while she looks at the book) if you've ever seen this.

SIR RALPH, from the sofa, with his glass.

That ?

GRACE, holding out the album.

This sketchbook.

SIR RALPH, struck, then slowly rising.

Seen it ?—Where ?

GRACE.

At Courtlands—the hour you arrived.

SIR RALPH.

How can I remember what I saw the hour I arrived ?

GRACE.

Mr. Ashdown can remember. He told me.

SIR RALPH, startled, staring.

Told you ?

GRACE.

Half an hour later. That you had seen Mr. Bernal's name.

SIR RALPH.

His name—where ?

GRACE, handing him the album.

On that page—with that date.

SIR RALPH, with the album ; looking hard an instant at the page ; then
hard an instant at GRACE.

I believe I have. What then ?

GRACE.

You denied it—in my own presence. (Then after an instant.)
You denied it to the Vicar.

SIR RALPH, after looking at the book again, chucking it away as if with
indignant impatience.

What the devil are you talking about ?

GRACE.

About the great wrong you were guilty of. You deceived
a dying man—you robbed a living.

SIR RALPH.

Living? I didn't *dream* he was living !

GRACE.

It seems to me that book might have made you dream !

SIR RALPH.

It would if I had seen it in time.

GRACE.

You did see it in time—in time to show it to Mr.
Ashdown.

SIR RALPH, staring, as if recalling.

That was after the Vicar—

GRACE, as he just hesitates.

Had put you that solemn question? No, Sir Ralph, Mr. Ashdown has satisfied me that it was before.

SIR RALPH.

Satisfied you? How?

GRACE.

By his comparison of notes with me, and by his positive declaration.

SIR RALPH.

His positive declaration's a lie.

GRACE, after an instant.

Will you say that to *him*?

SIR RALPH.

With all the pleasure in life!

GRACE, passing to the kitchen.

Then I'll call him to hear it!

SIR RALPH, as she reaches the door.

A moment, Madam. (Then after an instant abrupt, as she stops with her hand on the latch.) What is it you want?

GRACE, vague an instant.

Want?

SIR RALPH.

To let me alone. (As she leaves the door.) I asked you that, you know, at Courtlands.

GRACE.

Yes, and I told you to guess.

SIR RALPH, after an instant.

I couldn't guess so soon.

GRACE.

Can you guess at present?

SIR RALPH, after consideration.

Fifty pounds?

GRACE, echoing, stupefied.

Fifty pounds?

SIR RALPH.

Not enough? A hundred? (Then at a loss; as she only stands looking at him.) It's not money? (As if with a fuller vision of the real question and his inevitable fate.) It's the *other* thing?

GRACE, back at the kitchen, while MARK BERNAL reappears.

It's the other thing!

Exit GRACE JESMOND.

SIR RALPH, aghast, fatalistic, to himself, as BERNAL comes in.

Marriage!

Re-enter MARK BERNAL from the street.

BERNAL, struck, arrested by Sir RALPH's appearance and discomposure; speaking with the note of real anxiety.

She has proposed?

SIR RALPH, throwing up his arms from his sides and letting them fall.

She has proposed!

BERNAL, dismayed, credulous.

And you've accepted?

SIR RALPH.

I've asked for a minute!

BERNAL, wonderstruck, turning it over.

A minute?

SIR RALPH.

To decide—to think!

BERNAL, uneasy, painfully mystified; throwing himself quickly, in the interest of delay, of diversion, into the question of the portrait; shifting his easel.

That's it—you'll decide at your ease; you'll think while you sit!

SIR RALPH.

I'll be hanged if I'll sit! (Then after an instant, while BERNAL stares with dismay.) At any rate not here. (As TEDDY reappears: re-enter TEDDY ASHDOWN from the kitchen.) I'll sit at home.

TEDDY, surprised, ejaculating.

At home?

SIR RALPH, looking very hard at TEDDY.

At home.

TEDDY, mystified, bewildered by the way Sir RALPH glares at him, fascinatedly returns his stare; then to BERNAL.

May I go out?

SIR RALPH, precipitately interposing.

Go out? Never!

BERNAL, surprised, pleading.

Dear Ralph, it's his day!

SIR RALPH, in alarm.

His "day"? (Then, while the two ladies reappear; as if everything is overwhelmingly against him.) Mercy *on* us!

Re-enter Lady BASSET and MAUD VANNECK from the parlour, dressed for departure.

TEDDY, delighted.

I'll go with *them*! (Then to the ladies, indicating Sir RALPH.)
He'll sit at home!

LADY BASSET.

At home? (Coming down to Sir RALPH, who, on the right, has collapsed upon the sofa.) I shall *be* there!

Exit Lady BASSET to the street, the door to which BERNAL holds open.

MAUD, coming down to Sir RALPH; disgusted.

I shall *not*!

She goes up as BERNAL comes down, and is received by TEDDY, who offers her his arm. Exeunt TEDDY ASHDOWN and MAUD VANNECK to the street.

SIR RALPH, who has sat engulfed in reflections, wholly heedless of what the two women have said to him, rises grave and pale; then to BERNAL.

I've decided!

BERNAL, eager.

You refuse?

SIR RALPH, fatalistic.

I accept !

BERNAL, dismayed.

On the spot ?

SIR RALPH.

It's to come ! (Lifting and dropping his arms to his sides as before.)
Let it come ! (Then as GRACE reappears : re-enter GRACE JESMOND
from the kitchen, dressed to go.) Miss Jesmond !

BERNAL, still more alert, anticipating, interposing.

Miss Jesmond !

SIR RALPH, while GRACE, surprised, arrested by the intensity of BERNAL'S
tone, stands looking from one of the men to the other.

I've something to say to you.

BERNAL, strenuous, insistent, with a gravity and anxiety altogether new, like
his whole aspect and manner in what follows.

I've something to say first !

GRACE, uncertain.

To *me*, Mr. Bernal ?

BERNAL, indicating RALPH.

To him ! (Then very urgent.) While I say it will you kindly
wait ?

GRACE, still more vague.

Wait ?

BERNAL, who has opened the door of the parlour.

In there ! (GRACE hesitates an instant, looking in the same wondering per-
plexity from one of the men to the other. Then, after resting her eyes intensely
on BERNAL'S, she abruptly decides and goes quickly into the parlour. BERNAL

closes the door on her and, with his eyes on Sir RALPH, stands a moment holding the handle. Then coming down with decision, and with the rising passion of all his doubt in the question.) *That* girl—after your fortune?

SIR RALPH.

After my fortune—and (hesitating an instant, as if in resentment at that's being thought his only attraction, while he smartly taps his breast) after *me*!

BERNAL, worried, frowning, challenging, incredulous.

You say she proposed?

SIR RALPH, very definite.

She made me an offer!

BERNAL.

But of what?

SIR RALPH.

Why, of her hand—and her person.

BERNAL, amazed.

You didn't understand her!

SIR RALPH.

It was painfully clear.

BERNAL, after an instant.

My dear Ralph—I don't believe it!

SIR RALPH, after another instant.

You impute to me—misrepresentation?

BERNAL.

I impute to you—aberration ! (Then as if he can't get over it.)
You intend to *marry* her ?

SIR RALPH, fully determined ; as if with the resignation of the highest
wisdom and enlightenment.

It will keep her quiet !

BERNAL, dissuasive, ironic.

An *intrigante*—of a dangerous type ?

SIR RALPH, demonstrating his cleverness.

I conjure the danger away !

BERNAL, almost derisive.

A hungry adventuress ?

SIR RALPH.

I thought you contested that ! (Then as BERNAL, in his agitation,
moves nervously away.) She has beauty—and mind !

BERNAL, echoing, realising.

Beauty and mind ! (Then in a different tone, with high decision.)
My dear fellow, you mustn't *do* it !

SIR RALPH, irritated at his opposition.

To oblige *you* ?

BERNAL, after an instant.

To oblige me !

SIR RALPH.

Pray, are you in love with her ?

BERNAL, *evasive.*

If I am, it's your fault. (*As if it settles the matter.*) You told me to be !

SIR RALPH, *positive.*

I told you to pull up !

BERNAL.

It was too late to pull up—and it's too late now.

SIR RALPH, *more uneasy, suspicious, wondering.*

Now ?

BERNAL, *smiling.*

I want to keep on !

SIR RALPH, *in still deeper disapproval and alarm.*

Paying your court ?

BERNAL.

Paying my court !

SIR RALPH.

To make her your wife ?

BERNAL.

To make her (*in deep uncertainty, agitation, distraction, faltering*) I'll be hanged if I know what !

SIR RALPH, *as if following up an advantage and looking about him in reprobation.*

The partner of your misery ?

BERNAL, *in despair, troubled, impatient compunction.*

Yes—I'm too deadly poor ! (*Then after an instant, with returning clearness and resolution.*) But I do know what I want. I want to prevent *you* !

SIR RALPH, wound up, taking up the challenge.

You shan't prevent me ! (Then at the door of the parlour, which he has quickly opened.) Miss Jesmond !

BERNAL, as quickly opening the door to the street, while GRACE reappears.
Miss Jesmond !

‡ Re-enter GRACE JESMOND.

SIR RALPH, pressing.

Will you do me a favour ?

BERNAL, forestalling her answer ; passionate.

Will you do *me* one first ?

GRACE, still more mystified by their heated aspect ; looking from one to the other and then addressing BERNAL.

Anything—for *you* !

BERNAL.

Then walk out of the house !

GRACE, startled, pained, for the moment, by the manner of the request.

Out of the house—?

BERNAL, feverishly peremptory ; pointing to the open door.

This moment !

GRACE, looking once more from one of the men to the other as they stand on either side of the stage ; then, with a visible effort, deciding and sadly, supremely addressing BERNAL.

Good-bye !

Exit GRACE JESMOND, while the two men stand defiantly confronted.

ACT THIRD

Sir RALPH DAMANT's drawing-room in Portland Place ; handsome, cold, conventional and characteristic. A door at the centre from the hall and staircase ; doors right and left from other reception rooms.

GRACE JESMOND is seated in her hat and cape ; not the same garments as in Act Second, but, as to mourning, perceptibly modified and brightened. The FOOTMAN who has appeared in Act First enters from the hall.

FOOTMAN.

I find Sir Ralph is *not* at home, Miss ; but he gave orders that if you should call you were to be particularly asked to wait.

GRACE.

Till he comes in ?

FOOTMAN.

He may be expected at any moment.

GRACE, after an instant.

When were these orders given ?

FOOTMAN.

On Thursday, Miss, on our return from Vandyke Lodge. (Then expansive, as if glad of an opportunity to converse.) I was there with the carriage—and I joined in the chase.

GRACE, struck.

The chase?

FOOTMAN.

For you, Miss. Sir Ralph drove hard—to catch up with you.

GRACE, after an instant ; quiet.

He didn't catch up.

FOOTMAN, smiling.

We had wasted precious moments.

GRACE.

You mustn't waste them now.

FOOTMAN.

He remarked that you'd turn up !

GRACE, after reflection.

Since I'm expected, I'll wait.

FOOTMAN, increasingly sociable.

We've another party in another room.

GRACE, rising, wondering.

Another party?

FOOTMAN.

From Vandyke Lodge.

GRACE, startled, changing her mind.

I believe, after all, I won't wait !

FOOTMAN, as TEDDY appears.

Here's the other party.

Enter TEDDY ASHDOWN from the right.

GRACE, dropping into her chair again with relief.

Oh !

TEDDY, much pleased.

You're just the person I want !

FOOTMAN, privately ; ironical.

All of 'em ? Gracious !

Exit the FOOTMAN to the hall.

GRACE, rising again ; anxious.

Is Mr. Bernal here ?

TEDDY.

He'd be if he suspected *you* are ! I'm looking for him, and he's looking for Miss Jesmond.

GRACE.

He's coming for the portrait ?

TEDDY.

By appointment. They've patched it up.

GRACE, vague.

The portrait ?

TEDDY.

Oh no—their quarrel !

GRACE, still vague.

Their quarrel ?

TEDDY.

About you ! I know what happened.

GRACE, smiling.

That's more than I do, Mr. Ashdown !

TEDDY.

Then I'll tell you.

GRACE, postponing.

When does Mr. Bernal come ?

TEDDY, looking at his watch.

Not till twelve. He put me on a 'bus with the traps—they're all in there. (Indicating the adjoining room.) He's walking to save the fare.

GRACE.

Then he'll take some time ?

TEDDY.

He crawls along—because he looks out for you in the streets. He peeps under every bonnet ! He has sent me to all those fellows for news of you.

GRACE.

The artists ? I've been to none of them.

TEDDY.

He said you'd require to go.

GRACE.

I do "require" ! (Then after an instant.) But I don't go.

TEDDY, after a moment.

You come here instead.

GRACE.

I come here instead.

TEDDY.

But not, I fear, for Mark.

GRACE.

Not for Mr. Bernal. For Sir Ralph Damant.

TEDDY, after another moment.

Was it for Sir Ralph you came to *us*?

GRACE.

It was for myself.

TEDDY.

That was what their row was about—when Mark was so rude.

GRACE.

How rude was Mr. Bernal?

TEDDY.

Rude enough to repent! He has repented fearfully of what he did to you.

GRACE, after an instant.

He asked me to leave his house.

TEDDY.

Oh, he has told me; he talks of nothing else!

GRACE.

I've talked of it—to no one.

TEDDY, alert.

Then you've forgiven him?

GRACE, with the same smile.

I've forgiven him.

TEDDY, with the same eagerness.

May I tell him, when he comes?

GRACE, after an instant.

I've asked you before to keep a secret.

TEDDY.

About that sketch-book? (With emphatic satisfaction.) I've kept it!

GRACE.

Beautifully. Then keep this one.

TEDDY, vague.

Your forgiving him?

GRACE.

My being in this place. I wish not to see him.

TEDDY, perceptibly mystified.

And yet you remain?

GRACE.

Only for one reason,—that if I go now I shall not have
courage to return.

TEDDY.

“Courage”?

GRACE.

It was not easy!

TEDDY.

To face Sir Ralph? Why, *I* have to!

GRACE, after a moment.

Yes—you have to.

TEDDY.

do it for Mark!

GRACE, after an instant; with her tired smile.

And *I* do it for “Mark”! To render him a service.

TEDDY, eager.

Then you like him?

GRACE, hesitating, but still smiling.

You ask too many questions!

TEDDY.

I asked that one because he likes you

GRACE.

I guessed so when he turned me out.

TEDDY.

Did you? He has been afraid you wouldn't!

GRACE.

I didn't at first. But then I thought about it.

TEDDY, sympathetically interested.

And then it came to you?

GRACE.

Little by little. (After a moment.) It came to me last night.

TEDDY.

And that brought you here?

GRACE.

Early, as you see. To acknowledge his favour!

TEDDY.

But how—if you don't meet him?

GRACE.

I shall meet Sir Ralph.

TEDDY, alert.

Meet him and refuse him?

GRACE, consciously blank.

"Refuse" him?

TEDDY, surprised at her blankness.

Doesn't he want to marry you?

GRACE, grave.

Quite the contrary !

TEDDY.

And *you* don't want it ?

GRACE, with controlled emotion ; after an instant.

Has he asserted that ?

TEDDY.

To Mark—on Thursday. You made him an offer.

GRACE, rising quickly.

Which he saw reason to accept—precisely !

TEDDY.

It was why Mark banished you. To separate the parties
—to avert the danger !

GRACE.

To prevent Sir Ralph's accepting ?

TEDDY.

To choke him right off !

GRACE, eager.

Mr. Bernal believed it ?

TEDDY, vague.

That Sir Ralph would ?

GRACE.

No—that I had done such a thing.

TEDDY, after an instant's reflection.

It didn't prevent him from wanting you—

GRACE, as he modestly pauses.

“Wanting” me?

TEDDY.

For his own use!

GRACE, dropping into a seat again; sitting there an instant in thought; then rising and with frankness and courage, as well as with a forced gaiety intended to dissimulate her sadness and make her discussion of such a matter with TEDDY pass.

Mr. Bernal may “want” me, Mr. Ashdown; but Mr. Bernal can't have me!

TEDDY, vague, disappointed.

Can't have you?

GRACE.

It ties my hands.

TEDDY, blank.

I don't understand!

GRACE.

I do—at last! I had thought it all out—but you greatly help me.

TEDDY, kind, simple, loyal.

I *want* to greatly help you.

GRACE.

You did so, you know, at Courtlands.

TEDDY.

By holding my tongue? It was hard!

GRACE.

I shall set you to-day an easier task. You will be so good as to speak.

TEDDY, alert.

Tell Mr. Bernal—?

GRACE, interrupting.

That I'm in the house.

TEDDY.

But where shall you be?

GRACE, at a momentary loss; looking round her, then pointing to the door on the left.

In there.

TEDDY.

Why not in here?

GRACE.

So you may prepare him.

TEDDY, blank.

"Prepare" him?

GRACE.

Give him his choice—of seeing me or not.

TEDDY, laughing.

He'll take it! (Then more gravely.) And if I speak for you, will you speak for me?

GRACE, vague.

To whom?

TEDDY.

To "dear Maud." I want her—for *my* own use!

GRACE, smiling.

I'll approach her—if I've a chance.

TEDDY, with resolution.

I'll make you one!

Re-enter the FOOTMAN from the hall.

FOOTMAN, to GRACE.

Mr. Bernal.

GRACE, startled.

Coming up?

FOOTMAN, who has crossed to the door on the left, which he has opened.
If you'll pass in there.

TEDDY, anxious, while GRACE reaches the other room.

Can I trust you?

GRACE, at the door, with a smile.

If you can trust *her*!

Exit GRACE JESMOND to the left.

FOOTMAN, explaining, after closing the door on her.

Sir Ralph's orders.

TEDDY, vague.

His orders?

FOOTMAN.

If Mr. Bernal should come.

TEDDY, disconcerted.

He's not to see her?

FOOTMAN, self-complacent, responsible.

For fear of complications!

TEDDY, disgusted; thinking.

Why, what does Sir Ralph call *that*? (Then seeing BERNAL.)
Silence!

Enter MARK BERNAL from the hall. Exit the FOOTMAN to the hall.

BERNAL.

Ralph's not here?

TEDDY.

I've been waiting.

BERNAL.

With everything ready?

TEDDY, embarrassed, at fault.

Not yet; I thought—

BERNAL, breaking in; with kindly impatience.

You think too much—you always *did*! (Then indicating the door on the right.) Be quick!

TEDDY, demurring, hesitating.

Before I go—

BERNAL, as he pauses.

Before you go?

TEDDY.

Miss Jesmond's in the house!

BERNAL, amazed.

Here?—now?

TEDDY.

She told me to tell you.

BERNAL, eager.

Then I can see her?

TEDDY.

You can see her.

BERNAL, struck, in the midst of his relief; mistrustful, wondering.

But what's she doing?

TEDDY, vague.

Doing?

BERNAL.

For what purpose has she come?

TEDDY.

For the purpose of helping you.

BERNAL, blank.

But how in the world—?

TEDDY.

I give it up!

BERNAL, uneasy, peremptory ; suddenly nervous and discomposed ; passing his hand over his head.

Make ready !

Re-enter, as he speaks, the FOOTMAN from the hall.

SERVANT, announcing.

Lady Basset !

BERNAL, starting, as if struck with a quick idea, then still more imperative, to

TEDDY, who has lingered, looking at him, with a hand on the door at the right.

Leave us !

Exit TEDDY ASHDOWN to the right. Enter Lady BASSET from the hall.
Exit the FOOTMAN.

BERNAL, as if amused.

How did you get in ?

LADY BASSET.

The butler passed me up. (Jubilant, exultant.) I'm invited !

BERNAL.

By Sir Ralph ?

LADY BASSET.

By Sir Ralph. (Triumphant.) He wants me !

BERNAL, surprised.

For what ?

LADY BASSET, with lively confidence.

You'll see when he comes !

BERNAL.

But he doesn't come ! (Looking at his watch.) You must help me to bear it.

LADY BASSET, self-complacent, coquettish.

I helped you, you know, to bear it the other day !

BERNAL, preoccupied with the idea of GRACE's presence.

Indeed you did—immensely !

LADY BASSET.

We had recourse to my artistic nature.

BERNAL, vague.

Do you wish to have recourse to it again ?

LADY BASSET, after serious reflection.

Not to the same extent. (Then with serenity and lucidity.) If I was present the other day as an artist, I'm present to-day as a woman.

BERNAL, with the same vagueness as before.

Is it in that capacity he has sent for you ?

LADY BASSET, blank.

In what other capacity, pray—? (After an instant.) The very servants recognise it !

BERNAL, not following.

Recognise it—?

LADY BASSET.

By their eagerness to usher me in !

BERNAL, suddenly struck ; with a light.

In here—to *me* ?

LADY BASSET, vague, surprised at the point he makes of this.

They mentioned I should find you !

BERNAL, as the fuller light breaks upon him ; with amused elation ;
seizing her arm.

That's what he wanted of you !

LADY BASSET, blank, disconcerted.

To amuse you ?

BERNAL.

To captivate me—as he wants me to captivate you !

LADY BASSET, candid, jovial.

You do, my dear man !

BERNAL, laughing.

And so do you !

LADY BASSET.

But why does Sir Ralph desire it ?

BERNAL

To protect himself. He fears you.

LADY BASSET, exultant.

I feel that he does !

BERNAL, amused and relieved by his discovery.

I see it all !

LADY BASSET.

All what ?

BERNAL.

Why, he means you to draw me off !

LADY BASSET, vague.

Off somebody else ?

BERNAL, smiling.

A person he wants for himself !

LADY BASSET, struck, alarmed.

For himself? (Then with quick dismay.) Maud Vanneck ?

BERNAL, amused.

No, not Maud Vanneck.

LADY BASSET, thinking ; then with eager intensity.

Grace Jesmond ?

BERNAL.

She's in the house !

LADY BASSET, still more alarmed.

Invited ?

BERNAL.

No, not invited—he hasn't her address.

LADY BASSET.

She has come of herself ?

BERNAL, after an instant, as if recognising the full gravity of this.

She has come of herself.

LADY BASSET, stupefied, scandalised.

What effrontery !

BERNAL.

Her reason is doubtless good.

LADY BASSET, as if struck with the tone in which he says this.

You're in love with her ?

BERNAL.

Ralph thinks so.

LADY BASSET, imperative.

Then for God's sake marry her !

BERNAL, after an instant ; troubled, sincere.

How *can* I—in my position ?

LADY BASSET, coinciding.

Yes—she's after money. (Then with decision.) But she won't get it !

BERNAL.

Do you mean that *you* will ?

LADY BASSET, after an instant.

Sir Ralph is pledged to me.

BERNAL, uncertain, bewildered, nervous.

Then why does he want *her* ?

LADY BASSET, blank a moment ; then with resentment.

Because he's false !

BERNAL, pleading.

Ah, no—he's honest ! (After an instant.) See how he makes us meet !

LADY BASSET.

You and me ?

BERNAL.

For you to swallow me up !

LADY BASSET, impressed with the unsuspected truth.

And you to swallow *me* ?

BERNAL, smiling.

So that you won't have room for *him* ! (After an instant.) You admitted just now that there wasn't much !

LADY BASSET, with decision.

You're a very brilliant man, but I reject you.

BERNAL.

Ralph has counted on your appreciating me enough—
(Hesitating, pausing, as if with a last scruple ; then in a changed tone.) Hang it—I can tell you *now* !

LADY BASSET, eager.

To let Sir Ralph off ?

BERNAL.

To be merciful.

LADY BASSET.

For the benefit of that creature ? Never !

BERNAL.

You really hold out ?

LADY BASSET.

Against you? I loathe you!

BERNAL.

And you permit me to loathe back?

LADY BASSET.

If you love another woman!

BERNAL.

I haven't told you I do!

LADY BASSET.

That's because you're such a flirt. You won't part with one victim—

BERNAL, laughing, interrupting.

Before I make sure of another? (Then again preoccupied.)

Yes, I must make sure. (After an instant.) And while I'm making sure—

LADY BASSET.

I shall be doing the same!

BERNAL, amused.

You'll be all there?

LADY BASSET, with clear resolution.

All here!

BERNAL, after a moment's intense reflection; going up to the bell,
which he rings.

I must see my way!

LADY BASSET, *vague*.

What are you doing?

BERNAL.

I'm making sure ! (Re-enter the FOOTMAN from the hall. To the FOOTMAN.) Am I correct in believing that Miss Jesmond's in the house?

FOOTMAN, *embarrassed*.

Did the young gentleman tell you, sir?

BERNAL.

Of course the young gentleman told me.

FOOTMAN.

Would it do for me, then, to deny it?

BERNAL, *staring*.

Deny it? Why should you deny it?

FOOTMAN.

Because Sir Ralph said she wasn't to see you.

BERNAL, *struck ; then with high decision*.

Then he should be at home to prevent it !

FOOTMAN.

He may be at any moment, sir.

BERNAL.

Then I must see her quickly !

FOOTMAN.

I'll inform her.

Exit the FOOTMAN to the left, leaving the door open.

LADY BASSET.

She can scarcely be said to shrink !

BERNAL, amused.

If you compare it with *your* shrinkage !

LADY BASSET.

Mine, such as it is, forbids me to witness your encounter !

BERNAL, indicating the room on the right.

Then kindly pass in there.

LADY BASSET, vaguely demurring.

In there ?

BERNAL.

Where Sir Ralph's to sit.

LADY BASSET, at the door, alert.

I'll wait for him !

Exit Lady BASSET to the right. Re-enter GRACE JESMOND from the left.

GRACE, pausing where she enters.

I asked Mr. Ashdown to tell you of my presence—strange as it must inevitably appear to you.

BERNAL.

As your presence must appear?

GRACE.

No—as my request to him must.

BERNAL.

In the light of the extraordinary leave I last asked you to take of me? It's to explain that monstrous proceeding that I have begged for these words with you. I've hunted for you hard, but in vain—to make you hear them.

GRACE.

There is a word I myself should like to speak. (After an instant.) The simple request to you to believe—

BERNAL, waiting, as she pauses.

To believe?

GRACE.

Nothing Sir Ralph Damant may say of me.

BERNAL.

You're aware then of what he has in fact said?

GRACE.

It's because I think I divine it that I've come here.

BERNAL, after an instant.

Not, I suppose, at his request.

GRACE.

He couldn't request me—in ignorance of where to find me.

BERNAL.

The ignorance you've *me* to thank for!

GRACE.

As I do thank you, Mr. Bernal.

BERNAL.

You thank me for showing you the door, for turning you out of my house?—turning you without mercy into the great city you had scoured in vain, and in which I myself soon enough cursed the folly that had deprived me of a possible clue to you?

GRACE.

We meet again in spite of that folly.

BERNAL.

We meet again in spite of it. (Then after an instant.) But we meet again in a manner to which it would take but little more of my perplexity to make me prefer our separation.

GRACE, after a hesitation.

Is that because you do believe Sir Ralph?

BERNAL.

If he has told me a strange story of you, why do you, on your side, take a step which gives a detestable colour to it?

GRACE.

This step of coming to see him? Because it's the only way to say to him—something that I *have* to say.

BERNAL.

I've no right whatever to ask you what that may be.

GRACE.

I've a limited power, none the less, to tell you. He has misunderstood me ; and it is important to me that he should be informed that he has.

BERNAL.

Important ? (Then after an instant, half-impatient, half-pleading.) Ah, *why* is it important ?

GRACE, hesitating, momentarily embarrassed.

I'm afraid I can only say to you—because I hold it to be !

BERNAL, with an apologetic, penitent gesture.

I insult you with my curiosity when I only wanted to convince you of my regret. It was my respect for you the other day, that made me use a freedom !

GRACE.

The sense of that respect consoles me !

BERNAL

I'm delighted to hear it ; but what's to console *me* ?

GRACE, after an instant.

For what, Mr. Bernal ?

BERNAL.

For seeing Sir Ralph Damant again stand between us !

GRACE, after another instant.

Excuse me if I don't perceive how it should matter to you where Sir Ralph Damant stands.

BERNAL.

You saw how it mattered the other day !

GRACE, quiet.

I saw the fact, but not the reason. (Then with a sad smile.) You ask me, I think, for more explanations than you give !

BERNAL, admitting this ; speaking very kindly.

You must be generous with me, for I'm much troubled.

GRACE.

It's because you're much troubled that I'm here. (Then while he stares ; explaining.) I saw your poor home the other day, and I heard your confession.

BERNAL, struck, alert.

Of want of means ?

GRACE, tender, indulgent.

My intrusion, my appeal brought it out.

BERNAL.

So that you're here for money ?

GRACE, after an instant.

I'm here for money !

BERNAL, wondering, amazed.

For my relief?

GRACE, after another pause.

Are you too proud to accept relief?

BERNAL.

If I'm proud at all, Miss Jesmond, I'm proud of having inspired — by such an accident — such a sympathy !
(After an instant.) Your charity is (hesitating for his word ; then bringing it out with an extravagance of warmth in which there is just a shade of the irony of his imperfect credulity, his sense of strangeness) magnificent !

GRACE, gentle.

Such as it is, it's all my motive !

BERNAL, going on.

Still more magnificent is your belief in my cousin's sensibility.

GRACE.

You mean it's extravagant? (After an instant.) It would be —if I hadn't grounds for it.

BERNAL, struck.

Grounds? (Then after reflection.) Shall I strike you as the most graceless of men if I venture to ask what they are?

GRACE.

I can't tell you, Mr. Bernal, what they are !

BERNAL.

And yet you said just now that you give more explanations—

GRACE, as he hesitates.

Than *you* do? (After an instant.) I was wrong. (With pathetic dignity.) I feel that I don't give enough!

BERNAL, worried, agitated, almost feverish.

You give enough to enchant me, but not enough to satisfy! Why should you wish to remedy my preposterous predicament?

GRACE.

Because I regret it!

BERNAL, with the same troubled spirit as before.

Your "regret" is more mystifying than the step for which it accounts, and your good faith only ministers, somehow, to the impulse that makes me challenge you!

GRACE.

My ambiguity is my misfortune.

BERNAL.

Say rather it's mine! If I appealed to you just now kindly to see me, it was to make my own behaviour clear. How *can* I make it clear—

GRACE, interrupting.

If I don't make mine?—You can't!

Enter Sir RALPH DAMANT from the hall. Re-enter at the same moment
Lady BASSET from the right.

BERNAL, to Sir RALPH, who has his latchkey visible and has stopped short,
deeply disconcerted, on finding him with GRACE.

I asked to see Miss Jesmond.

GRACE, to Sir RALPH.

I arrived before Mr. Bernal.

LADY BASSET, on the right.

I arrived after !

SIR RALPH.

And I've arrived last of all ! (Controlling with an effort, as he comes down, his discomfiture at MARK'S meeting with GRACE, and taking now the line of a smoothly astute and diplomatic manner of dealing with his difficulties.) I've been detained, but I'm all the more pleased to find you gathered !

GRACE, grave.

I've not presumed you'd care to find *me*.

SIR RALPH, urbane, engaging, gay.

Then I must teach you presumption ! I bid you welcome to Portland Place.

LADY BASSET, impatient but majestic.

And have you no welcome for another friend ?

SIR RALPH.

The warmest, dear lady. I summoned you to be present at the sittings.

LADY BASSET, disappointed at the inadequacy of this explanation.

I should still have been if you hadn't !

SIR RALPH, imperturbable ; indicating the room on the right.

They take place there. (Then motioning her to pass out again.)
Be so good as to await me.

LADY BASSET.

While you dally with Miss Jesmond?

SIR RALPH, answering the question but addressing GRACE.

To make up for the occasion of which Mark so cruelly
deprived me !

BERNAL, gay.

I've made up a little, on my side, for the loss I equally
suffered !

SIR RALPH.

I take my revenge in kind ! (Opening the door on the right and
pointing the way out to BERNAL.) Be so good as to leave the
room.

BERNAL, troubled, demurring.

This moment ?

SIR RALPH.

This moment !

BERNAL, at the door ; looking at GRACE ; after an instant.

Good-bye !

Exit MARK BERNAL to the right.

SIR RALPH, to Lady BASSET, while GRACE, with emotion, nervous, restless,
wanders up to a window on the left.

Won't you join him ? (Then as her attitude appears a refusal ; in-
sinuating.) He admires you !

LADY BASSET, staring ; as if stupefied.

Do you mean by that that *you* don't ?

SIR RALPH, conciliatory, heroic.

My admiration's of a different strain !

LADY BASSET.

Such as it is, I'm here for you to show it.

SIR RALPH.

I do show it—I *am* showing it. (Then as he indicates the open door and other room again.) By this privilege !

LADY BASSET.

That of Mr. Bernal's company ?

SIR RALPH, pleadingly argumentative.

Doesn't he tell you what he thinks of you ?

LADY BASSET.

Every one does that !

SIR RALPH, still pleading.

I will—in three minutes !

LADY BASSET, at the door ; having looked at her watch.

I shall time you !

Exit Lady BASSET to the right.

SIR RALPH, having closed the door and remaining an instant at the right,
while GRACE is up at the left.

I followed you in vain, and it was sweet of you to come !

GRACE, coming down.

It may have been "sweet," Sir Ralph, but it has not been easy!

SIR RALPH.

It gives me the chance to say what I wanted so much to say!

GRACE, seating herself.

And it gives me the chance to hear it!

SIR RALPH.

What I wanted to say is that I accept your proposition.

GRACE.

Are you very sure, first, that you understand it?

SIR RALPH, surprised at her question.

There was surely little room to blink it! (Then after an instant.) And I've taken my time to consider.

GRACE, very quiet.

I gather then the fruit of my exertions.

SIR RALPH.

If your exertions were extraordinary, you must admit that the fruit is splendid!

GRACE.

There's nothing so splendid as the triumph of justice.

SIR RALPH, struck, demurring.

Do you call it by that name?

GRACE.

By what name do *you* call it?

SIR RALPH.

Generosity—extravagant! But we won't quarrel about the description!

GRACE.

We won't quarrel about anything, in the presence of the accomplished fact.

SIR RALPH, wincing, momentarily failing.

That's a description that, I confess, does give me a start! (Reflecting with intense gravity.) It brings my position home to me.

GRACE.

Exactly where it *should* be brought.

SIR RALPH.

I'm a bit of a fatalist; it's the finger of doom! My line of argument has been that sooner or later I should feel the knife at my throat—*have* to make the sacrifice; and that it constitutes after all the purchase of my freedom.

GRACE.

When you have paid the price your freedom will be perfect!

SIR RALPH, struck, eager.

I may do as I like—I may go my way?

GRACE.

My dear Sir Ralph, I'll never speak to you !

SIR RALPH, following up the conception of this advantage ; thinking.

And of course, on that footing, nobody else will ! (More confident.) Nobody else *can* !

GRACE, confirmatory.

There'll be nothing left to say !

SIR RALPH.

Precisely, no *locus standi*. (Ingenuous.) That's the one thing that reconciles me.

GRACE, after an instant.

The one thing ? (Then as he stares, struck, incipiently alarmed by her intonation.) No sentiment—no emotion ?

SIR RALPH, still staring ; plainly surprised.

Since you press me, Madam, none whatever !

GRACE.

The mere bald concession ?

SIR RALPH, more markedly surprised, even scandalised at her qualification of his sacrifice.

Do you consider it such a trifle to “concede” my existence ?

GRACE, blank.

Your existence ?

SIR RALPH.

Even with what I reserve ! My fortune, my position, my name !

GRACE.

Your name ? What have I to do with that ?

SIR RALPH, bewildered.

You don't propose to bear it ?

GRACE, rising.

Heaven forbid, Sir Ralph ! (Then lightly and quietly, as he stares, stupefied.) You make me an offer ?

SIR RALPH, with precipitate and indignant eagerness.

Never in the world !

GRACE.

Then what are you talking about ?

SIR RALPH.

Your horrible ultimatum !

GRACE, after an instant.

It's your impression that I've made *you* an offer ?

SIR RALPH.

Twice over, in so many words !

GRACE.

Which you've done me the honour to accept ?

SIR RALPH.

For the advantage I've named !

GRACE, amused, smiling in spite of her disgust and dismay.

Your view of the "advantage" touches me! I did make you an offer, Sir Ralph, but it was only the offer of a chance.

SIR RALPH, vague, anxious.

A chance?

GRACE.

To make a restitution—to divide your inheritance.

SIR RALPH, staring; with his assurance flickering back.

Divide it with *you*?

GRACE.

With Mr. Bernal. That was my "ultimatum"!

SIR RALPH, dropping, overwhelmed, into the seat from which GRACE has risen.

That?

GRACE.

I appealed to you to give him his share—the share he would clearly have enjoyed if your kinsman had lived another day.

SIR RALPH, with the same amazed ruefulness.

Make him a present of a fortune?

GRACE, simple.

Two thousand a year.

SIR RALPH, after an instant during which he has risen.

So that you may offer to marry *him*?

GRACE.

You exaggerate my impatience to marry.

SIR RALPH.

You exaggerate mine to indulge in preposterous gifts !

GRACE, after an instant.

You don't accept your chance ?

SIR RALPH.

You must permit me to view it in the light of reason !

GRACE.

That's exactly what I appeal to you to do. You treated me just now to the argument of security. Let me treat you to the same ! Your security is your honour.

SIR RALPH, after an instant.

And my honour, you seem to imply, is your sport ?

GRACE.

I daresay I could have a game with it !

SIR RALPH, after another instant

With that little ass to help you ?

GRACE.

Mr. Ashdown ? He's in the other room.

SIR RALPH, with excited derision

Quite the Chamber of Horrors !

GRACE.

I should apply that title to this one.

SIR RALPH, as she moves to go.

You leave me, Miss Jesmond?

GRACE, at the door to the hall.

I've corrected your mistake.

SIR RALPH, still with his nervous and ironic laughter.

Won't you give me your address?

GRACE, blank.

For what purpose?

SIR RALPH.

I may have a word to say to you!

GRACE, after an instant's hesitation.

If you have a word to say, say it to Mr. Bernal!

SIR RALPH, smiling.

It may not do—for Mr. Bernal!

GRACE, turning to the door again.

Then it won't do for me!

SIR RALPH, as she has her hand on the door; with a sudden complete, quite violent change of manner and accent.

Miss Jesmond, listen to me! (Then as GRACE, struck, arrested by this transformation, stops short, looking at him.) You say you've

corrected my mistake ; but I confess I've made more than one ! (GRACE, as if, after a momentary hesitation, under the influence of a puzzled hope that his oddly altered tone may denote his readiness to do the justice she has demanded, comes slowly a few steps down, while he goes on.) I told you a while ago that if I stood ready to marry you it was without sentiment, without emotion. But those words were a wrong to you—they were a greater wrong to myself. (She continues to rest her wondering, expectant eyes on him, and he proceeds with gathered assurance.) The emotion, charming woman, has come—the sentiment insists on a voice. (Then, under the permission of her silence, producing his confident climax.) I make you, Miss Jesmond, the proposal that I regret you didn't make *me* !

GRACE, after a moment of intensely controlled disappointment and horror ;
with the cold irony of her stupefaction.

Your mistakes are sufficiently strange ; but I think your corrections are stranger !

SIR RALPH, insistent, persistent.

You say that you offer me a chance ; but what is it compared to the chance I offer *you* ? What you ask of me for another, I press on you for yourself ! (Then with an exasperation rising from the vision of the incorruptibility with which she stands there.) Do you measure what I mean and what I possess ? Can you reflect on it and refuse ? I've guessed your poverty ; I've sounded your depths. Without a home, without protection in this cruel city, consider in what a refuge you stand ! (Then as she simply turns from him with a movement that expresses all her sickened inaccessibility, and he has got between her and the door to the hall, more and more urgent and imperative, half-pleading, half-resentful and altogether passionate.) You really refuse ?

GRACE.

To be bought off? (With an almost wild motion of clearing him from her path, while the door opens from the hall and the FOOTMAN reappears: re-enter the FOOTMAN from the hall.) Let me go!

FOOTMAN, announcing.

Miss Vanneck!

Enter MAUD VANNECK from the hall.

SIR RALPH, disconcerted, overwhelmed, furious, to the FOOTMAN.

Who let her in?

MAUD, serene.

The butler, Sir Ralph; I asked for Lady Basset!

FOOTMAN.

Your things are put out, sir.

SIR RALPH.

Things? What things?

FOOTMAN.

To sit for your picture, sir—the costoom.

SIR RALPH.

Damn the costoom!

Exit Sir RALPH rapidly to the hall, while the FOOTMAN holds open the door
Exit the FOOTMAN.

GRACE, to MAUD.

You asked for Lady Basset?

MAUD.

To take me out again. (After an instant.) I find I can't face them!

GRACE.

Face what?

MAUD.

The usual dangers.

GRACE, with a sad, sincere smile and headshake.

They're horrible! Don't try. (Then after a moment.) Don't trouble Lady Basset. I'll take you out.

MAUD, surprised.

You, Miss Jesmond? Where?

GRACE.

Out of this house, to begin with. It's not a very nice place!

MAUD, struck with her tone and air; then kind.

I see it has been horrid somehow for *you*—and yet you have ideas for others.

GRACE.

I've ideas for Mr. Ashdown! He asked me to speak for him.

MAUD.

Is he here?

GRACE, turning away as she sees BERNAL.

Ask Mr. Bernal.

Re-enter MARK BERNAL from the right.

MAUD, joyous, spontaneous, to BERNAL, who has stopped short on finding
GRACE still in the room.

Why, Miss Jesmond's charming !

GRACE, facing about again quickly.

She says so because I spoke to her of Mr. Ashdown.

BERNAL, behind whom the door of the other room has closed ; to MAUD.
He's in there with Lady Basset.

MAUD.

And what's Lady Basset doing ?

BERNAL.

Waiting for Sir Ralph.

MAUD, with striking ingenuousness.

How very vulgar !

GRACE, to BERNAL, smiling.

Miss Vanneck's not here for *that* !

BERNAL, to MAUD.

It wouldn't help you if you were !

GRACE, to BERNAL, urgent.

You must appeal for your friend.

BERNAL, to GRACE.

Your friend too, Miss Jesmond. He simply adores you.

MAUD, struck.

Does he indeed?

GRACE, amused.

Because I intercede!

BERNAL.

I've interceded too! (To MAUD.) Didn't I struggle hard for him?

MAUD.

At Vandyke Lodge? (After an instant.) I've not forgotten it!

GRACE, to MAUD.

Let him struggle for himself!

BERNAL, to MAUD.

Shall I call him in?

MAUD, at the open door on the left; hesitating; then to GRACE.
What's beyond that room?

GRACE, smiling.

A conservatory.

MAUD, to BERNAL.

Please call him!

Exit MAUD VANNECK to the left. BERNAL opens door on the right,
and on his summons re-enter TEDDY ASHDOWN.

GRACE, to TEDDY.

I've spoken for you!

TEDDY, eager.

To dear Maud?

BERNAL, indicating the left.

She's in the conservatory.

TEDDY, at the door on the left, in suspense, his hand to his heart.

Will she *have* me ?

BERNAL.

Go and see !

TEDDY, ardently, to GRACE.

Benefactress !

GRACE, grave, sad.

Ah, don't call me *that* !

TEDDY.

Then angel !

BERNAL, laughing.

Keep that for Miss Vanneck !

TEDDY, indicating GRACE.

Then *you* thank her !

Exit TEDDY to the left.

GRACE, smiling sadly.

You shouldn't, for they haven't a penny !

BERNAL.

What of that ? No more have we !

GRACE, vague.

"We" ?

BERNAL, seeing Sir RALPH.

It doesn't matter !

Re-enter Sir RALPH DAMANT picturesquely dressed to sit for his portrait ; a costume carefully selected and studied.

SIR RALPH, stopping short, in high displeasure, on seeing BERNAL reunited to GRACE.

You've come back ?

BERNAL, with a gesture of abdication, of frank, final confession.

My necessity forced me — I expected to find you.
*(After an instant.) I throw up my charge.

SIR RALPH, aghast, indicating the room to the right.

That woman ?

BERNAL.

That avalanche ! I can't arrest its course !

SIR RALPH, dismayed, indignant.

You don't appreciate her ?

BERNAL.

I can't handle her, and I judged it right to notify you.

SIR RALPH, thinking intently, in his alarm.

She's not amenable—?

BERNAL.

To any argument I can use !

SIR RALPH.

But she has plenty of her own !

BERNAL.

I perceive them, but somehow I resist them !

SIR RALPH, contending, protesting, insisting.

Such brilliant points ?

BERNAL.

She doesn't see mine !

SIR RALPH.

You told me she did !

BERNAL.

It was what she first told *me* ! But now she takes it all back.

SIR RALPH, in deeper dismay the more he thinks.

Back ?

BERNAL.

She objects to me !

SIR RALPH.

And you object to *her* ?

BERNAL.

I'm not so rude as to tell her so—but I do !

SIR RALPH, in the tone of indignant injury ; scandalised.

Do you call such an objection loyal ?

BERNAL, blank.

“ Loyal ” ?

SIR RALPH.

After all I have done for you !

BERNAL.

Pray what have you done ?

SIR RALPH, pulled up, embarrassed an instant, by the question ; then indicating, with angry fatuity, the nobleness of his appearance.

Dressed myself—as you see !

BERNAL, taking him in, up and down.

For your portrait ?

SIR RALPH, exhibiting himself.

As the “ Patron of Art ” !

BERNAL.

My dear Ralph, *my* art must go unpatronised ! (With the note of rueful melancholy, but smiling.) No song no supper !

SIR RALPH, outraged.

You won't paint me ?

BERNAL.

Wasn't I to paint you only if I saved you ?

SIR RALPH, with a wail of despair.

So I'm lost ?

BERNAL, seeing Lady BASSET.

Ask her ladyship !

Re-enter Lady BASSET from the right.

LADY BASSET, pausing at the door and glaring with majestic reproach and displeasure at Sir RALPH.

I've come for you !

SIR RALPH, in mortal anguish.

Come for me ?

LADY BASSET.

I gave you three minutes.

SIR RALPH, looking at his watch, confessing in despair his transgression.
And I've taken thirty !

BERNAL, to Lady BASSET, indulgently extenuating, explaining.

You see, there's to be no portrait !

SIR RALPH, eagerly, in the same way.

I'm not to sit to him.

LADY BASSET, staring an instant ; then formidably indicating the open door.
Then you're to sit to *me* !

SIR RALPH, demoralised, tragic, looking blankly at the open door while she points the way out ; and then, with the climax of despair, appealing supremely
to MARK BERNAL.

Help me !

BERNAL, hesitating, thinking an instant ; then indicating GRACE as, after having wandered up the stage in impatient suspense during his dialogue with Sir RALPH, she now comes down again.

Help *me* !

SIR RALPH, as if with the last terrified lucidity of reflection, the sudden dawn of a new idea, which he leaps at, making up his mind, while his eyes move an instant from GRACE to BERNAL and while Lady BASSET still stands in control of the open door.

Wait for me !

Exit Sir RALPH to the right.

LADY BASSET, to the others, smiling triumphantly.

He'll not be long !

Exit Lady BASSET to the right.

BERNAL, to GRACE.

I bade you good-bye ; but, thank heaven, you were kept for me !

GRACE.

I was kept by my occupations.

BERNAL.

The first of your occupations now (tender, ardent) must be to forgive me !

GRACE.

For believing a story so monstrous ?

BERNAL.

I didn't believe it, but it puzzled me ; it puzzled me because I cared—I mean because I loved you ! (Then, as she starts at this, turning away.) I hadn't the right to tell you so, any more than I have it now ; and that made me wild, it made me mad, it made things crooked and dark to me.

GRACE, very sad.

And still they're not straight, not clear ! I've tried to serve you, but I haven't served you yet.

BERNAL, passionate.

You serve me at this moment by letting me tell you that I trust you !

GRACE.

What if you trust me to little profit ?

BERNAL.

The "profit" is the joy of confidence ! The confidence was there though I was troubled ; it was there though I was mystified. I want no proof that you're precious, or the only thing I ask of you is to let me deserve your charity !

GRACE.

You make me almost want to have failed—in order to have the right to listen to you. You must never be able to say of me that my effort was half for myself.

BERNAL.

Give up your "effort"—give up what exposes and divides us ! How can I possibly desire any boon that has made you cruelly suffer for me ?

GRACE, after quick, intense reflection.

I haven't cruelly suffered "for" you ; but (with another pause of hesitation) I believe I could suffer *with* you !

BERNAL.

You shan't, if you'll take me ; I declare you shall only enjoy ! You'll teach me a better way to live ; you'll teach me a finer way to work ! (Taking up his hat, which he has put down on coming in.) Let us go forth as we *are*—together !

GRACE, thinking, yielding, but hesitating.

And forego the advantage—

BERNAL, as she pauses.

The advantage ?

GRACE.

Of further communion with Sir Ralph !

BERNAL.

Has that communion been so sweet ? (With a decisive, comprehensive motion as of final and total rupture.) Good-bye to it !

GRACE, with a last perfunctory scruple.

You don't really want to know— ?

BERNAL, energetically breaking in.

I don't want to know anything ! (Laughing.) I revel in my ignorance and in the prospect of your society (Then as if to vanquish her last lingering hesitation.) It was not for you to help *me*, dearest—it is for me to help *you* !

GRACE, thinking, assenting, but looking about her with a faint, vague sigh of regret for what she gives up.

So fate may have decreed ! (Then as she surrenders her hand surrenders herself wholly.) And I like it as well !

BERNAL, with a joyous laugh, drawing, pressing her to his bosom.

I like it much better !

Re-enter TEDDY ASHDOWN.

TEDDY, arrested an instant ; then as they quickly separate ; radiant.
Dear Maud has accepted me !

BERNAL, in the same manner.

And Miss Jesmond has accepted *me* !

Re-enter MAUD VANNECK from the left.

LAUD, after a moment's modest pause in the doorway ; demurely to GRACE.

Mr. Ashdown will take me out !

GRACE, smiling at her and accepting BERNAL's arm as if to represent the immediate application of the words.

and Mr. Bernal will take *me* !

BERNAL, seeing Sir RALPH.

though Sir Ralph looks dangerous !

Re-enter Sir RALPH from the right.

SIR RALPH, white, haggard, almost ravaged.

we accepted Lady Basset !

BERNAL, smiling, as Lady BASSET, radiant, reappears.

We all do the same !

Re-enter Lady BASSET from the right.

SIR RALPH, looking with concentrated and agitated significance at Lady BASSET and speaking with intense and calculated deliberation.

You'll do so with double relish when you see with what zeal she joins me—

LADY BASSET, vague, as he invitingly pauses ; as if made uneasy by his look and tone.

joins you— ?

SIR RALPH, encouraged and sustained by her alarm.

in an act of enlightened justice.

GRACE, with irrepressible joy.

justice ?

LADY BASSET, growing darker.

Sir Ralph, what madness—?

SIR RALPH, hopefully exalted.

The madness, my lady, of making over to Mark the inheritance I've held in trust for him!

LADY BASSET, aghast, astounded.

Four thousand a year?

SIR RALPH.

Four thousand a year! (To BERNAL.) You *would* have had it!

BERNAL, amazed, bewildered.

The whole property? I might have had a little!

SIR RALPH, uplifted by the assurance of his success, while he looks at Lady BASSET.

You shall have all! You have nothing of your own, and I have enough.

LADY BASSET, almost shrieking in her derision and dismay.

Enough?

SIR RALPH.

My dear, in having *you*!

LADY BASSET, overwhelmed, indignant, with a gesture of outraged retractation.

You *haven't* "me"! (With the violent motion of clearing her path, throwing up the whole thing, she goes rapidly up. Then at the door to the hall, with concentrated repudiation.) Betrayers!

Exit Lady BASSET to the hall.

BERNAL.

My dear Ralph, you're too splendid !

GRACE, to BERNAL.

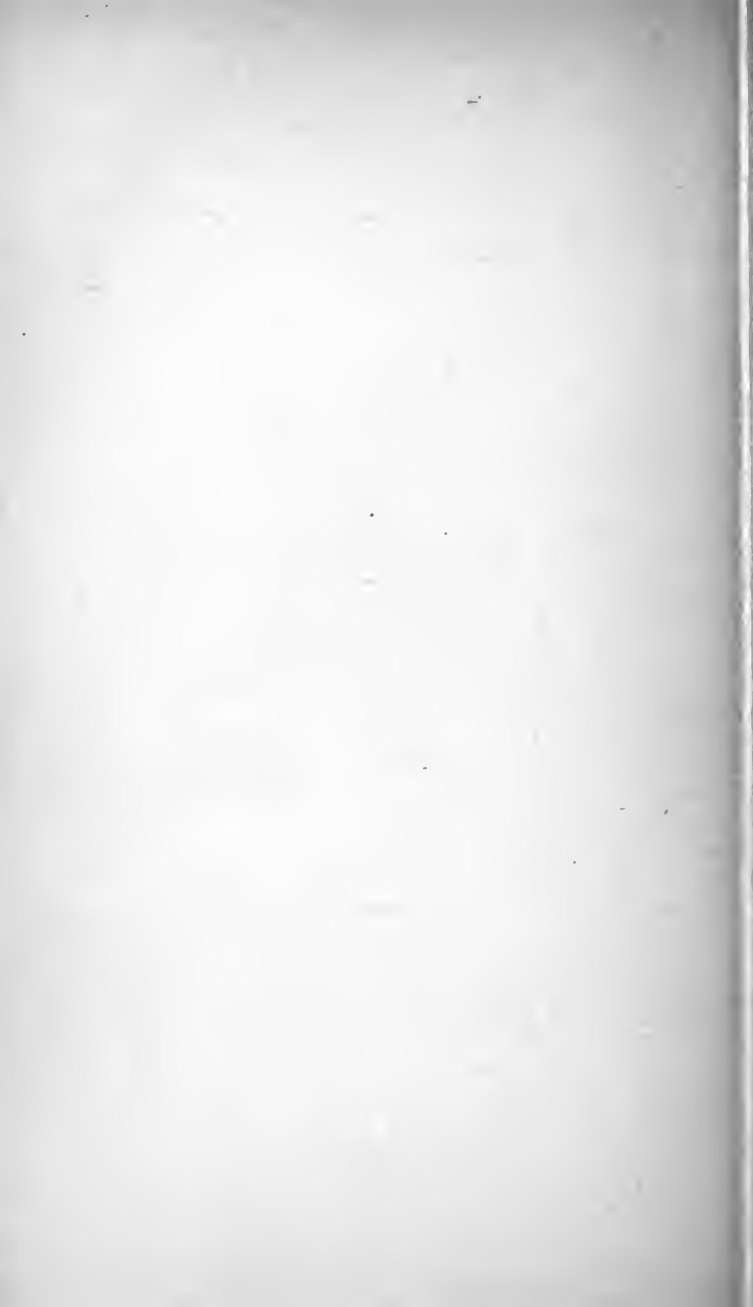
Wait till you get it !

MAUD, on TEDDY'S arm ; demurely, to Sir RALPH.

You'll never see her again !

SIR RALPH, relieved, restored, reassured ; measuring, satisfied.

It's cheap !



THE REPROBATE

IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

MR. BONSOR.

PAUL DOUBLEDAY.

CAPTAIN CHANTER.

PITT BRUNT, M.P.

CUBIT.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

BLANCHE AMBER.

ACT FIRST

Whitsuntide. The drawing-room at Mr. Bonsor's villa at Hampton Court. Wide double doors, across the upper angle on the right, open from the hall and other parts of the house. Half way down on the right a door to the adjacent rooms. On the left, far up, at the other angle, a wide French window, open to the lawn. Further down on the left the door to the library. A table with drawers and several objects upon it somewhat to the left, near the front. More to the right a table for a tea-tray. To the right, below the lower door, a tall cabinet. The room old-fashioned but cheerful, comfortable but slightly severe. Plenty of chintz and mahogany ; wall-paper, hung with steel-engravings, of 1850. An old bachelor's house ; the whole aspect ugly.

Enter CUBIT and Mrs. FRESHVILLE from the hall, he backing down a little before her as if she may be forcing her way. Mrs. FRESHVILLE smart and showy, with hair conspicuously "golden."

CUBIT.

Certainly, ma'am, you may come in ; but Captain Chanter's positively not in the house.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Where then *is* Captain Chanter ?

CUBIT.

He may have gone up to town.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

For what purpose?

CUBIT.

I haven't the least idea.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Is there any one in the house who *has* an idea?

CUBIT.

Oh yes—lots of them!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, looking at him a moment.

They must be rubbish. Any women?

CUBIT, vague and slightly shocked.

Women, ma'am?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Petticoats. All men?

CUBIT, clearer.

Two men and a boy.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, looking round her, taking everything in.

What sort of a boy?

CUBIT.

In buttons—to do the knives.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Oh *that* sort ! They're a fraud ! (Seeing PITT BRUNT at the open window, through which BRUNT steps in from the lawn.) Who's *this* person ?

Enter PITT BRUNT.

CUBIT, announcing.

Mr. Pitt Brunt !

PITT BRUNT, coming down ; privately to CUBIT, while Mrs. FRESHVILLE seats herself at the right of the table on the left.

Who's that person ?

CUBIT.

No idea, sir !

Exit CUBIT to the hall.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I'm waiting—I'm awfully tired.

PITT BRUNT, in a modified boating-suit, with a double eyeglass, very neat and deliberate, and slightly hesitant and puzzled.

A—tired of waiting ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Not yet—in your company ! Been on the river ?

PITT BRUNT.

I put in an hour each day.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I used to put in hours—the dear old river !

PITT BRUNT.

It's hygienic—if you're moderate.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I *ain't* moderate ! I never was !

PITT BRUNT.

It's best, you know, to be safe.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, looking at him an instant, while he smiles complacently ; then rising suddenly.

Do you think you *are* ?

PITT BRUNT, startled a little, retreating a step, then smiling at her again.
I'm not very sure !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, laughing.

If you were, I'd do for you ! Are you staying in the house ?

PITT BRUNT.

No—are you ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Till I've done what I've come for. (Then abrupt, familiar.
What have *you* come for ?

PITT BRUNT.

I put in an hour each day.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Here too ? Why, you must have a time-table !

PITT BRUNT.

My life is thoroughly organised.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Mine is deliciously irregular.

PITT BRUNT.

Ah, but you're not in the House !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, *vague*.

What house ?

PITT BRUNT.

The House of Commons !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Do you mean *you* are ?

PITT BRUNT.

I sit for Blackport.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

At *your* ridiculous age ?

PITT BRUNT, *with dignity*.

My constituents have never inquired it.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

That's the sort of people I like ! Where are such ducks to be found ?

PITT BRUNT.

On the banks of the Smutt, in the extreme north. I meet them there, I address them, in a day or two ;

but in the meantime I'm spending the Whitsuntide recess at Teddington.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

And what are you doing at Teddington?

PITT BRUNT.

I'm reading.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Reading what?

PITT BRUNT, after an hesitation

Everything!

Re-enter CUBIT from the hall.

CUBIT.

Mr. Bonsor has come in, sir.

PITT BRUNT.

And Miss Amber?

CUBIT.

Not arrived.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, to CUBIT, as he waits.

You may go. (Exit CUBIT to the hall. To PITT BRUNT, as he takes up his hat to follow him.) *You* may not! (Then as BRUNT puts down his hat.) Who in the world's Miss Amber?

PITT BRUNT.

Mr. Bonsor's niece.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

And who in the world's Mr. Bonsor?

PITT BRUNT, surprised at the question.

The master of this house. One of my strongest supporters. He has interests at Blackport—I look after them. I have interests here—

MRS. FRESHVILLE, interrupting.

And *he* looks after them! Tit for tat! Is he married?

PITT BRUNT.

Not yet.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

There's always time! What's his age?

PITT BRUNT, hesitating.

He's getting on!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

And are *you*?

PITT BRUNT.

Remarkably well!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Remarkably well married?

PITT BRUNT.

Not married at all! I mean I'm getting on.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I'm glad to hear it. Is she good-looking?

PITT BRUNT.

Who, madam?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Mr. Bonsor's niece.

PITT BRUNT.

I should use a still stronger expression.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Always use the strongest there is! Is she one of your interests here?

PITT BRUNT, smiling.

The greatest!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

And Mr. Bonsor looks after it?

PITT BRUNT.

He desires our union.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

"Union" is tame. Where is she to arrive from?

PITT BRUNT.

From the continent, where she has spent most of her life, and where—in Germany, six months ago—I was so fortunate as to make her acquaintance.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, to herself.

Germany? Then it's not *she*! (To BRUNT.) Isn't there another woman?

PITT BRUNT, with simpering ardour.

There's *no* other woman!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

For you—I see! But for him?

PITT BRUNT.

For whom?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, checking herself, reconsidering.

Never mind whom! (As she looks about her she suddenly spies, on the table on right, a roll of unfinished embroidery, on which she pounces. Holding it up.) Whose untidiness is that?

PITT BRUNT, looking at it with his glasses.

That embroidery? Perhaps it's Mrs. Doubleday's.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

And who on earth is Mrs. Doubleday?

PITT BRUNT.

A lady in the house.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, with a little vindictive shake of the embroidery, which she clutches.

Then I've got her! Rich?

PITT BRUNT.

Five thousand a year.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Good-looking?

PITT BRUNT, after an instant.

I should use a still weaker expression.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, promptly suggestive.

Hideous?

PITT BRUNT, hesitating again.

Fat.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

And old—horribly old? (Pressing.) *How* old?

PITT BRUNT, thinking.

She's getting on.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

She ought to be ashamed of herself! Where's her husband?

PITT BRUNT, grave.

Beneath the sod.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, gay.

Like mine! What then is she doing here?

PITT BRUNT.

Spending a month.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

With a bachelor?

PITT BRUNT.

They have a common object.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

What sort of object?

PITT BRUNT.

A child.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Hers?

PITT BRUNT.

His!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Mr. Bonsor's?

PITT BRUNT, with a somewhat scandalised movement of repudiation.

Mr. Doubleday's—the son of his first marriage. This lady, the stepmother, is one of the joint guardians. As Mr. Bonsor is the other, they have often to meet.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

How old is the child?

PITT BRUNT.

He's getting on.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You seem *all* to be getting on!

PITT BRUNT.

He's about thirty.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Then why the deuce guardians ?

PITT BRUNT.

It's a peculiar case—he's vicious.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Stuff—I don't believe it !

PITT BRUNT.

There *are* such men.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You should give them their head !

PITT BRUNT.

Doubleday can't be trusted. He requires the iron hand
—and he knows it !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I see—like *my* young man !

PITT BRUNT, vague.

Yours ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

He requires it—and *he* knows it. But I forgot—you
don't !

PITT BRUNT.

Permit me then to retire.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Send me the butler ! (Exit PITT BRUNT to the hall. Unfolding the embroidery, she looks at it a moment.) Hideous ! the work of an ugly woman. Never mind, it's evidence ! (Rolling the embroidery up with decision, she thrusts it into her pocket.) I see my way. No warning—a pounce ! (Seeing CUBIT, she extracts her purse from a small smart reticule which she carries on her arm, and takes a gold coin from it. Re-enter CUBIT from the hall. Having put the reticule upon the table on the left and the purse into her pocket, she hands the coin to CUBIT.) Can you change me that ?

CUBIT, with the sovereign, mystified.

I've only sixpence.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, taking the sixpence which CUBIT has produced.
Sixpence will do.

CUBIT, still more mystified.

And the rest ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, significant, with something very like a wink.
Enjoy the rest !

CUBIT, to himself, gleefully, while he promptly pockets the sovereign.
Nineteen-and-six ? What a rum tip !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I'm awfully thirsty. Is there any place near ?

CUBIT.

I could give you something—for the money !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

The money's for something else—the money's to hold your tongue.

CUBIT.

Hold it to the Captain ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Don't mention me—see ?

CUBIT.

I see. But who'll hold Mr. Brunt's ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I'm already his secret : I *feel* I am ! Good-bye.

CUBIT.

I could throw in a glass of sherry.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I loathe sherry. I'm coming back.

CUBIT.

Let me show you the place.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, motioning him back

I always find the place ! Don't attract attention !

Exit Mrs. FRESHVILLE to the hall.

CUBIT, alone, looking after her.

It'll be a near thing if *you* don't! I'd remark her anywhere! (Perceiving her reticule on the table.) Hullo! has she left me *another* souvenir? (Taking up the reticule and hesitating while he looks at it.) Shall I go after her? No—I'll give it to her when she comes back. (Sniffing at it.) My favourite scent — what-do-you-call-'em! (Startled, seeing Mr. BONSOR, and immediately dropping the reticule on the table.) Oh!

Enter Mr. BONSOR by the lower door on the right.

MR. BONSOR, who has seen his movement.

To whom does that article belong?

CUBIT.

I was just wondering, sir.

MR. BONSOR.

Is your nose your organ of wonder? I seem myself to become aware of the recent presence of a female.

CUBIT.

A lady who has just gone, sir.

MR. BONSOR.

Gone where?

CUBIT.

No idea, sir.

MR. BONSOR.

What did she want?

CUBIT.

She didn't seem to know!

MR. BONSOR.

To whom was her visit presumably addressed?

CUBIT.

Couldn't make out, sir! (To himself.) Nineteen-and-six!
What'll *he* go?

MR. BONSOR, to himself, struck.

To Paul? (To CUBIT.) Did she make no observation?

CUBIT.

She observed that she'd come back.

MR. BONSOR, to himself.

Is he at it *again*? (To CUBIT.) When may we expect her?

CUBIT.

Really can't say, sir; but when she comes—

MR. BONSOR.

Let me instantly know. (Looking for a moment, with his glasses, without approaching it, at the reticule which CUBIT has restored to its place on the table on the left.) Let me examine that object. (CUBIT presents him with the reticule, which, while CUBIT holds it, he continues, without touching it, to look at in the same way.) Ruby velvet? Ostentatious.

CUBIT.

Slightly scented, sir. Shall I remove it?

MR. BONSOR.

Not offensive. You may leave it. (After CUBIT has again placed the reticule on the table.) Where is Mrs. Doubleday?

CUBIT.

Visiting the palace, sir.

MR. BONSOR.

Again? She visited the palace yesterday.

CUBIT.

Great historical interest, sir. Often spend an hour there myself.

MR. BONSOR, in his reflections.

Not alone, I suppose.

CUBIT, hesitating an instant, smiling.

Usually with a companion, sir.

MR. BONSOR, aloof.

I'm not interested in your companions. I allude to Mrs. Doubleday.

CUBIT.

Beg your pardon, sir. *Her* companion would probably be the Captain.

MR. BONSOR.

I thought Captain Chanter was to go to London.

CUBIT, smiling.

I didn't, sir. He was out with her yesterday.

MR. BONSOR, struck, prompt.

Was he? (Then dry.) I didn't ask you to watch their movements. Is Mr. Paul with them!

CUBIT.

They don't take him, sir. *He* might watch their movements !

MR. BONSOR, to himself.

It's the time to watch his ! (To CUBIT.) Where *is* Mr. Paul ?

CUBIT.

In the library, sir.

MR. BONSOR.

Then call him immediately.

CUBIT, without moving.

I might call him all day, sir—he would never be able to come.

MR. BONSOR.

What's the matter with him ?

CUBIT.

He's locked in. Mrs. Doubleday has the key.

MR. BONSOR.

Oh yes, I forgot ! (Feeling in his pocket.) I carry duplicates. (Producing a key and giving it to CUBIT.) Let him out.

CUBIT, to himself.

One would think he was a domestic animal !

Exit CUBIT, with the key, to the library.

MR. BONSOR, alone, taking up the reticule.

A mysterious female, with a meretricious appendage ?

Why not state her business? I hate anything underhand. (Trying to open the bag.) Confound the catch! (Opening it.) A photograph? (Taking one out of the bag.) Merciful powers—it's Paul! What fresh connection has he formed, with all our safeguards? And what's this written on the back? "Dudley—to his Nina!" She's his Nina, of course, but why is he her Dudley? Has he an *alias*—like a burglar? What dreadful revelations! Shall I confront him with this? No, I'll conceal it—I'll confer with my associate. (Slips the photograph into his breast-pocket; thrusts the reticule into the cabinet on the right. Enter PAUL DOUBLE-
DAY, from the library, with a book in his hand. To himself, seeing him.) Dudley!

PAUL.

Oh, Mr. Bonsor, is *this* a book I may read?

MR. BONSOR, with the book.

The Experience of Life? Decidedly not—it doesn't sound safe!

PAUL.

Shall I put it back?

MR. BONSOR.

By no means. (Looking at him strangely.) *I'll* put it back! Have you perused any portion of it?

PAUL.

Not a word—I waited to ask you.

MR. BONSOR.

Then how have you been occupied?

PAUL, melancholy.

I haven't been occupied !

MR. BONSOR, significant.

We must occupy you !

PAUL.

Do, Mr. Bonsor—I so want to fill the hours !

MR. BONSOR, suspicious.

You say that in a tone—

PAUL, conciliatory, explanatory.

The tone of conviction, Mr. Bonsor ! I've tried to speak of it to Mamma, but Mamma *is* occupied.

MR. BONSOR.

The occupation we shall propose for you is not the same as that which now engrosses your mamma.

PAUL.

Oh, yes—I don't mean *that* !

MR. BONSOR.

It's comparatively legitimate—for Mrs. Doubleday.

PAUL.

Yes, and it must be so jolly ! (Then on a movement of Mr. BONSOR's, quick.) When it *is* legitimate !

MR. BONSOR.

When it is we may perhaps concede that ! But there are cases in which it isn't. I needn't remind you that you've forfeited—

PAUL, with a sigh.

Oh, I know what I've forfeited !

MR. BONSOR.

I needn't remind you that our confidence in you isn't all that we could wish.

PAUL, genuinely meek.

You do remind me, Mr. Bonsor.

MR. BONSOR.

Occasionally, perhaps—for it's indispensable.

PAUL.

Yes—it's indispensable !

MR. BONSOR.

Such an occasion has now presented itself. If I just sent for you, it's to call your attention to the propriety of another sacrifice.

PAUL, pleading.

Another, Mr. Bonsor ?

MR. BONSOR.

I count upon you to make it.

PAUL, pulling himself together.

Well—I'll make it !

MR. BONSOR.

You know our system — your mother's and mine.
(Complacent.) The more sacrifices you make, the easier it
is to make 'em !

PAUL.

They come very easy now, Mr. Bonsor.

MR. BONSOR.

The present occasion will perhaps be something of a
test.

PAUL.

There's no test, Mr. Bonsor, that I shrink from !

MR. BONSOR, still more complacent.

You perceive then the success of our system !

PAUL, virtuous, like a prize pupil.

It works, Mr. Bonsor—in perfection !

MR. BONSOR.

There's a young lady about to arrive here.

PAUL.

Yes, Mr. Bonsor.

MR. BONSOR.

My niece, Miss Amber, who has been living abroad.
She has come to spend three months with me—I've
very particular views for her. What I want you to

understand is that I look to you not to interfere with them.

PAUL.

Tell me what they are, Mr. Bonsor, and I will regulate myself accordingly.

MR. BONSOR.

I don't see my way to describe them to you correctly as anything but matrimonial.

PAUL, with continued docility.

You wish me to marry her?

MR. BONSOR, shocked.

Not for worlds! I wish you to do the very opposite.

PAUL, vague.

The very opposite? Make up to her without intentions?

MR. BONSOR.

Not make up to her at all! She's guileless—she's fresh—she's pure. Let her remain so!

PAUL.

You mean that I'm not to speak to her?

MR. BONSOR, stern.

Never—till she speaks to *you*. (To himself.) I'll take care she doesn't!

PAUL, following closely.

Then I may answer her?

MR. BONSOR.

With extreme reserve.

PAUL, as if learning his lesson.

With extreme reserve. Is she possessed of—a—personal attractions?

MR. BONSOR.

Unfortunately.

PAUL, with intense assent.

Unfortunately!

MR. BONSOR.

Fortunately you are not!

PAUL, with intenser assent.

Fortunately!—And is her future husband?

MR. BONSOR.

Her future husband is that rising young star of his party, Mr. Pitt Brunt.

PAUL, precipitate.

Oh, *he's* not beautiful!

MR. BONSOR, pointed.

No, but he's good!

PAUL, checked, humiliated.

Yes—that's everything!

MR. BONSOR.

I've sent him to the station to meet Blanche.

PAUL, alert, in spite of himself.

Is her name Blanche ?

MR. BONSOR, severe.

You'll have no occasion to pronounce it ! (Looking at his watch.) I'm also expecting your mother's return.

PAUL, somewhat rueful.

So am I, Mr. Bonsor !

MR. BONSOR, significant.

She forgets herself !

PAUL, reassuring, yet ominous.

Oh, she'll remember *me* !

MR. BONSOR.

I hope so ! You constitute, in her absence, a responsibility of which I feel the weight ! (Deliberating.) I don't quite know what to do with you.

PAUL, passive.

Whatever you like, Mr. Bonsor !

MR. BONSOR, significant.

There are many things to consider.

PAUL.

Shall I return to the library ?

MR. BONSOR, dubious, taking up the book given him by PAUL and turning over a page or two.

Not till I've weeded it out ! (Tosses down the book as if with a sense of contamination.)

PAUL, suggestive.

Mamma sometimes keeps me in her room.

MR. BONSOR, considering.

I'm afraid that ground is forbidden me. (Austere.) I never enter your mother's apartment.

PAUL.

Mightn't you put me in yours ?

MR. BONSOR.

That ground would be forbidden *her*, should she have occasion to visit you.

PAUL.

She sometimes confines me in my own little room.

MR. BONSOR.

Your own little room's the best place for you. I'll ring for Cubit to convey you there.

PAUL, angelic.

Let *me* ring ! (Rings.) May I come down to tea ?

MR. BONSOR.

I don't know that to-day it will be advisable.

PAUL, venturing to plead.

I'm uncommonly thirsty, Mr. Bonsor.

MR. BONSOR.

We're acquainted with some of the aberrations of your thirst—which it is one of the leading features of our system to keep under control.

PAUL.

Dear Mr. Bonsor, tea isn't an aberration! (Seeing CUBIT.)
Here it is!

Re-enter CUBIT at the lower door on the right, followed by a footman
with a tea-tray.

CUBIT, to Mr. BONSOR.

Tea, sir.

MR. BONSOR.

Put it down. (The footman deposits the tray and retires. While he is
doing so BLANCHE AMBER appears, unperceived by the others, at the open
window, on the lawn.) And take Mr. Paul to his room.

Enter BLANCHE AMBER.

BLANCHE, precipitate, to CUBIT.

Oh, I say—please don't!

MR. BONSOR, startled, meeting and embracing her.

Dearest child! Where's Pitt Brunt?

BLANCHE.

I left him behind—I came across the lawn. We walked from the station—my maid has my things.

CUBIT, announcing, as PITT BRUNT appears at the window
Mr. Pitt Brunt !

Re-enter PITT BRUNT, from the lawn.

PITT BRUNT, slightly dignified and injured, to BLANCHE.
I should have been glad to pursue my explanation.

BLANCHE, laughing.
Pursue it—but don't pursue *me* !

MR. BONSOR, to BRUNT.
You can pursue everything here.

BLANCHE, who has been looking at PAUL.
Oh, not all at once, please !

MR. BONSOR, cheerful.
'There'll be plenty of time !

PITT BRUNT, hopeful.
Plenty of time !

MR. BONSOR.
Delighted to welcome you at last, Blanche.

BLANCHE.
So happy to arrive, at last, dear uncle, and to be already
(looking round her) so charmed with your surroundings !

CUBIT, to Mr. BONSOR

Beg your pardon, sir—am I to remove Mr. Paul?

BLANCHE, smiling, to Mr. BONSOR.

Won't you let me plead for him?

PITT BRUNT, to PAUL.

Oh, how d'ye do, Doubleday? I didn't notice you!

PAUL, ingenuously delighted, privately to PITT BRUNT.

Miss Amber does!

BLANCHE, privately to Mr. BONSOR.

Forgive my rash interference—Mr. Brunt has told me all about him.

MR. BONSOR.

It was to warn you in time. (To CUBIT.) Mr. Paul will first have his tea.

BLANCHE, approaching the tea-tray.

And mayn't I have mine?

MR. BONSOR.

Won't you have, after your journey, something more invigorating—a glass of wine?

CUBIT.

I've brought wine, sir. (Mr. BONSOR signifies to CUBIT that nothing more is wanted, on which CUBIT goes out by lower door on the right.)

BLANCHE, to PAUL, seeing him approach the tea-table.

Will *you* give me a glass of wine?

PAUL, at this darts in silence to the decanter and, filling a glass, hands it to
BLANCHE. While he is in the act of doing so enter Mrs. DOUBLEDAY from
the hall, perceiving with visible horror what is taking place.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, with loud abruptness.

Paul !

PAUL, with a startled jump, letting his wine-glass fall.

Mamma ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, to herself, coming down.

Drinking—with a woman !

MR. BONSOR, to Mrs. DOUBLEDAY.

My niece has arrived from Germany. (To BLANCHE.) My
amiable friend Mrs. Doubleday. (Mrs. DOUBLEDAY, without
shaking hands, greets BLANCHE with a distant and majestic curtsey.)

BLANCHE, after returning her salutation very much in the same way, to
PITT BRUNT, who, having seized from the agitated PAUL the decanter and
another glass, approaches her obsequiously.

Amiable ? I don't believe it !

PITT BRUNT, pouring out wine.

An exemplary woman.

BLANCHE.

I detest exemplary women !

PITT BRUNT, reprehensive.

Oh, Miss Amber !

BLANCHE.

And also exemplary men !

PITT BRUNT.

You *are* paradoxical ! Let *me* give you a glass of wine !

BLANCHE.

Thank you—I've changed my mind. (Seeing that PAUL, after his accident with the wine-glass, has poured out a cup of tea.) But I'll have a cup of tea.

PAUL, taking the invitation, darts to her with the cup. Enter at the same instant from the hall Captain CHANTER.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Paul !

PAUL, startled, jumping as before, and all but letting the cup drop.

Mamma ?

CHANTER, rushing forward and catching the cup.

Saved !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, seated down on the left.

Then bring it to *me* ! (CHANTER brings her the tea.)

MR. BONSOR, introducing.

Captain Chanter—Miss Amber !

BLANCHE, after nodding gaily at CHANTER, who has bowed to her.

I seem dangerous to the glass and china !

CHANTER, gallant, with his hand on his heart.

Not only, I take it, to such fragile objects !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Captain !

CHANTER veers round and talks to her. PITT BRUNT meantime has gone back to the tea-table and exchanged his decanter and glass for a cup of tea, with which he returns to BLANCHE. Mr. BONSOR, going up, has poured out a cup of tea and administered it, as it were, to PAUL, who stands helpless and rueful.

PITT BRUNT, with the cup, to BLANCHE.

Let *me* serve you.

BLANCHE.

Don't think me very capricious if I change my mind again. (To Mr. BONSOR.) I think what I really and truly want is to go to my room.

MR. BONSOR.

Let me instantly conduct you.

PITT BRUNT, to BLANCHE.

Let *me* wait for you here.

MR. BONSOR, to PITT BRUNT.

You're to stay to dinner, you know.

PITT BRUNT.

I've brought my things.

MR. BONSOR.

Cubit will show you where to dress.

PITT BRUNT, at the door to the hall to BLANCHE, whose back is turned.

Auf Wiedersehen !

Exit PITT BRUNT.

MR. BONSOR, to Mrs. DOUBLEDAY.

Shall I find you here in ten minutes?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, appealing to Captain CHANTER.

In ten minutes?

CHANTER, looking at his watch and smiling; to Mr. BONSOR.

Say a quarter of an hour!

MR. BONSOR.

A quarter of an hour. (He opens the lower door on the right for BLANCHE, who, during the appeal to Mrs. DOUBLEDAY, has passed round and paused an instant before PAUL, whom she looks at sympathetically and a trifle strangely; a movement, a passage between them, observed by Mrs. DOUBLEDAY.)

BLANCHE, at the door, to Mrs. DOUBLEDAY, smiling.

Excuse me!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Don't mention it! (Exeunt BLANCHE and Mr. BONSOR.) Paul!

PAUL, who has his eyes fixed musingly on the door; startled.

Yes, Mamma!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Go to *your* room.

PAUL.

Mayn't I come down to dinner?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, after consideration.

On the understanding that you sit by *me*.

CHANTER, protesting tenderly.

Then, dear lady, whom shall *I* sit by?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, privately, warning.

Hush—before *him* ! (To PAUL.) Go !

PAUL.

Yes, mamma.

Exit PAUL, submissive, to the hall.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, looking on the table.

Where in the world's my embroidery ?

CHANTER, helping her to look.

Your embroidery ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

It was here—it's gone.

CHANTER, gallant.

If I had seen it I should doubtless have purloined it—
treasure-trove ! But I really haven't seen it.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, glancing about.

I should prefer you to see it.

CHANTER, pleading.

Not just now, you know—I want *all* your attention.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

You've had it these three hours.

CHANTER.

Three hours were not enough—for all I had to say !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Yet you spoke with eloquence.

CHANTER.

Say indeed with passion—with all the ardour of a sentiment long repressed, bursting forth in a flood!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

And I followed you with natural embarrassment.

CHANTER.

With nothing more natural than embarrassment? With no indulgence for my faults, with no encouragement for my hopes?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I must consider—I must consult.

CHANTER.

Consult with *me*! It's just for that I offer myself! Didn't you tell me, moreover, that you would answer me in this place?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I've immense responsibilities.

CHANTER.

It's for the way you discharge them that I revere you.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

They've quite worn me out. What's left is—what you see.

CHANTER.

What I see is the most charming creature in England—a woman the picture of whose rich maturity is but the voluminous record of her extraordinary virtue.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I believe I've done my duty—but the burden has been heavy indeed.

CHANTER.

Let me take it on *my* shoulders !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Wait till you know what it has been in the past, to judge what it may be in the future.

CHANTER, *smiling*.

In the future we shall be two.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Say, alas, we shall be three !

CHANTER.

Oh, if you count that way we shall be four. We mustn't forget dear Bonsor.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Never—he has been everything to me.

CHANTER, *dubious*.

Everything ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

In my interminable martyrdom.

CHANTER.

He'll always be at his post. There's no fear of *his* ever marrying!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

There never was. He's impervious to female charms.

CHANTER, smiling.

That makes one more comfortable.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Oh, I haven't thought of conquest—I've thought only of my daily round. Mr. Bonsor will accuse me of deserting him.

CHANTER, argumentative, cogent.

You reinforce him!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I certainly shouldn't look at you unless I thought you were good.

CHANTER, self-complacent.

I do try to be good. The best of us can only try.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

And not all who try succeed. You do.

CHANTER, simpering.

Very kind of you to have noticed it.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

That's why I shrink from telling you everything.

CHANTER.

To the pure all things are pure !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

So I've had often to say to myself—in the atmosphere of Paul's propensities.

CHANTER.

It has left you unspotted.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, *anxious*.

Will it leave *you* so? That's the question that haunts me now.

CHANTER.

Just try me and see !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

You know, then, in a general way, the task I accepted on the lamented death of Mr. Doubleday.

CHANTER.

To watch over the product of his earlier union. You may be said to have watched.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Night and day—it was a sacred trust. His earlier union had been a blunder.

CHANTER.

He didn't know *you*.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

He couldn't. I was scarcely born.

CHANTER.

If you *had* been you'd have been saved—

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

This crushing legacy? It's not improbable. But I came too late.

CHANTER.

Not too late to save Paul.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Have I saved him? That remains to be seen! His mother, alas, was—indelicate!

CHANTER.

There *are* such women!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

She was a person of some appearance; but she was bold.

CHANTER.

Yet not unattractive!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

There were persons who thought so; but don't ask for details.

CHANTER.

I know you well enough to know it would be useless. But even without them I can judge of the blood that flows in Paul's veins.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Heredity, heredity ! My husband's favourite expression. He saw it bear dreadful fruit.

CHANTER.

From the child's earliest years ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Almost in the cradle. Fortunately he was on the lookout.

CHANTER, impulsive.

Poor old chap ! (Then prompt.) I mean Paul !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

It's indeed his misfortune even more than his fault. But it was to the advantage of every one when the fatal fountain of such dangers at last ceased to flow. My predecessor succumbed—to the last penalties of impropriety ; and Mr. Doubleday, after a considerable interval, did what he could to repair his original error.

CHANTER.

He married a faultless being.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

That's what he was so good as to pronounce me. Unhappily his compensation was not so complete as I could have wished. I presented him with a second son, who, alas, didn't live.

CHANTER.

If he had, he too would have been faultless.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Heredity again! It was then that we looked in the face—that we sadly but heroically accepted—our responsibilities to our little incumbrance: not with the vain hope of making him what his brother would have been, but with that of repressing his inclinations.

CHANTER.

And in some degree you succeeded?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Till his twentieth year. Then they burst forth.

CHANTER, pressing.

What did he do?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, hesitating, scrupulous.

Can I safely tell you?

CHANTER.

To the pure all things are pure!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Suppose I should communicate a taint?

CHANTER.

I must get accustomed to my danger.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

One does. Paul disappeared.

CHANTER.

How did he manage it?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

By the assistance of another person.

CHANTER.

What description of person?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

The lowest description. A singer, from the "Waterloo."

CHANTER.

The Waterloo?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

The name of a popular music-hall. *You* don't know such things—but I've had to learn them! *Her* name was Nina.

CHANTER, startled.

Nina?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Did you ever see her?

CHANTER.

Dear me, no ! (To himself.) Nina ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

They went to Paris.

CHANTER, impulsive, inadvertent.

That's the best place !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, surprised.

What do you know about it ?

CHANTER, on his guard.

One can't help hearing.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I can't, but *you* should ! We pursued him, we had a hunt ! and, after unspeakable anxieties and incredible efforts, we finally ran him to earth.

CHANTER with increasing interest.

Where *was* he ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

In sumptuous apartments—steeped to the lips in vice. He had given the rein to his passions.

CHANTER, breathless.

All of them ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Without exception. He had changed his name, he had waxed his moustache, he had overdrawn his account.

CHANTER.

Then you arrived just in time.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

To take him home. We took him.

CHANTER.

Did he kick?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

He was prostrate, he couldn't deny it.

CHANTER.

No, poor fellow, he does own up!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Our only mercy. He sees himself as he is. Well he may, when he killed his father.

CHANTER, startled.

Do you really mean—?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I mean that my husband died of the scandal. But in his last hours he cut me out my work.

CHANTER.

To keep hold of Paul?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

To prevent a recurrence.

CHANTER.

And you've prevented it !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

With the help of Mr. Bonsor, whom, as my husband's oldest and dearest friend, he appointed, as it were, my joint-supervisor. A childless widow with an ample provision, I had command of my time, and an equally childless bachelor with an equally adequate fortune, Mr. Bonsor had command of his. We've given it all to our work, we've had no other life.

CHANTER.

It's time to have another now.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Sometimes—when I falter—I think so.

CHANTER.

You've done so much.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

We've reduced it to a science. To *act* on the slightest symptom.

CHANTER.

To cry "Fire !" on the first puff of smoke !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

If we so much as sniff it, we turn on the hose. We flood the whole place.

CHANTER.

So that Paul lives, as it were, under water.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

It has taught him to swim, it has made him amphibious. We organise his hours; we regulate his thoughts; we control his imagination. We're intensely particular, for instance, about his reading. Nothing that treats of the passions.

CHANTER.

That cuts it down!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

We cut it down. We cut everything down. We allow him no pocket-money.

CHANTER.

None at all?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Sixpence a day.

CHANTER.

You can't be very bad on that!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

You can be very good! He gives it to the poor. We allow him no tobacco, no wine, and no female acquaintance.

CHANTER.

What then *do* you allow him?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Nothing. To such a nature everything's an opportunity. He reports himself at fixed hours, and, as you know, I rarely leave his side.

CHANTER.

Yes, I had a job to get you off.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I locked him up.

CHANTER.

But he got out.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Mr. Bonsor must have taken the responsibility. Four times a year we spend a month here—for Mr. Bonsor to do his part.

CHANTER.

He seems to do it very well.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, *dubious*.

Mr. Bonsor requires to be kept up. He shouldn't have invited that girl.

CHANTER.

Oh, I'll look after *her*!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Don't take the trouble, *I'll* look after her ! Now you see my life.

CHANTER.

To see it is to admire it ; but there's one thing I don't understand ! Paul's healthy, hearty, independent—

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

He's still an infant.

CHANTER.

An infant of thirty ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

By the terms of his father's will. He doesn't come of age till he's forty ; unless before that, in the exercise of our discretion, if it seems to us finally safe, we anticipate a little, we put him in possession.

CHANTER.

He could break such a will in an hour !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

It would never occur to him—he takes *our* view.

CHANTER.

Very obliging of him !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I do him justice—he repents. He's afraid of his passions.

CHANTER, as if with the deliberate resolve to face, courageously, considerable exposure.

Well, I ain't !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, anxious, ominous.

Are you sure they're not contagious ?

CHANTER.

I'll set him the example of mine.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Yours ?

CHANTER.

I've only one—it's for *you* !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

You're almost irresistible — but think it well over !
(Seeing Mr. BONSOR.) Here's Mr. Bonsor, for one of our regular councils, which we never postpone. (Re-enter Mr. BONSOR from the lower door on the right. Waving Captain CHANTER toward the library.) Think it over and over !

CHANTER, at the door of the library.

Coquette !

Exit Captain CHANTER.

MR. BONSOR.

On what are you inviting him so peculiarly to brood ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

My peculiar position.

MR. BONSOR.

What has he got to do with it?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, modest.

That he must confide to you himself.

MR. BONSOR.

Mrs. Doubleday, you've a bad conscience!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, with spirit.

Not worse than *you* ought to have!

MR. BONSOR.

I'm not straying into languid by-paths—I'm not thinking of a sacrifice to Hymen.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Of marriage? You think of nothing else but that girl's!

MR. BONSOR.

Well, if I'm a victim of duty, I'm also Blanche's uncle.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

And if *I'm* a victim of duty, I'm also— (Checking herself as if from delicacy.)

MR. BONSOR.

Not the Captain's aunt—though you might be!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

There's something *you* might be, Mr. Bonsor: a little more correct in your figures!

MR. BONSOR.

This is not a time to recriminate—it's a time for harmonious action. (Taking the photograph from his pocket.) Look at that !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, with the photograph.

Paul !

MR. BONSOR.

Dudley !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, looking at the back.

Nina !

MR. BONSOR.

She's here !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, horrified.

Here ?

MR. BONSOR.

Come back for him !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

After all these years ?

MR. BONSOR.

They've been wasted ! She was here an hour ago—she may return at any moment.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Prevent her—head her off !

MR. BONSOR.

Shall I see her alone ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, dubious.

No, that won't do ! *I'll* see her !

MR. BONSOR.

Such a person ? It's indecorous. *I'll* see her !

Exit Mr. BONSOR rapidly to the hall.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, with the photograph in her hand.

He's too proper by half ; he needn't accuse *me* !
(Tosses the photograph on the table and goes quickly to the door of the library, where she calls.) Captain ! (Then as CHANTER reappears : re-enter Captain CHANTER.) She's come back !

CHANTER.

Who's come back ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Nina !

CHANTER, bounding in.

Nina ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

We must double the guard !

CHANTER, to himself, excited, alarmed.

Heavens ! if it's *my* Nina ? (To Mrs. DOUBLEDAY.) Where *is* she ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Mr. Bonsor's gone to look.

CHANTER, nervous, starting to go up.

I'll go to look !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, commanding.

Captain! (As CHANTER comes down again.) You'll stay here.
(Indicating the table.) There's his photograph.

CHANTER, taking the photograph.

And where's hers? (Tosses the photograph back.)

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, struck.

Why should you want it?

CHANTER, rueful.

True—when we have the reality!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I'll turn the key in Paul's door!

CHANTER, looking at his watch.

You must dress for dinner.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

His room is next to mine. (Then with sudden seductiveness.)
Now do you want me?

CHANTER, ardent.

More than ever, beloved!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, giving him her hand to kiss.

Then take me!

CHANTER seizes it and kisses it with an air of rapture, on which Mrs. DOUBLEDAY snatches it away and goes out hastily to the hall. Re-enter CUBIT by the lower door on the right.

CUBIT.

I've put out the embroidered waistcoat, sir.

CHANTER, to himself, agitated.

Embroidered by Nina's hand!

Exit Captain CHANTER by the lower door on the right.

CUBIT, alone.

Does he know she was here? has he seen what she left? Where *is* that elegant object? (Seeing BLANCHE AMBER at the window.) *Here's* an elegant object! (Re-enter BLANCHE, dressed for dinner, from the lawn.) Quite comfortable in your room, Miss?

BLANCHE.

Perfectly, thank you!

CUBIT, looking at his watch.

Dinner in ten minutes.

BLANCHE.

I'm quite ready. (Exit CUBIT to the hall.) What sociable servants! (At the table on the left.) But what dreary books! (Taking up one.) *The Experience of Life*? (Turning it over.) Improving! (Flinging it down.) I hate improvement! The usual photographs? (Taking up the photograph of PAUL.) Ah, no, not quite! Poor Mr. Paul—in all his impropriety! What a history! He *is* handsome! (Turning over the photograph.) But why “Dudley”? Some wild pet name! How romantic! And who's “Nina”? (Musing while she looks again at PAUL's image.) Some great lady, perhaps, whose head he has turned—*her* pet name! Is *she* handsome?

(With her eyes for a moment on the picture.) I hope not ! (Seeing PAUL, who has appeared at the window, she is so startled that, as he comes in and down, she slips the photograph, to prevent his seeing it, precipitately, instinctively into her pocket. Enter PAUL DOUBLEDAY from the lawn ; shyly, hesitatingly, tentatively, as if his pretext has suddenly failed him. He is not dressed for dinner. He comes down, however, with a visible mixture of impetuosity and caution, which gives him an odd air that makes BLANCHE appear to wonder, with sudden amusement, what is the matter with him.) Are you looking for anything ?

PAUL, panting a little.

No, thank you !—I mean I *am* !

BLANCHE.

Anything that was on that table ?

PAUL, looking vaguely and as if a little surprised.

Nothing that was on that table. (Seeing *The Experience of Life*.)
Not that book—I mayn't touch it.

BLANCHE.

The Experience of Life ? Don't—it's dreadfully slow !

PAUL, surprised.

It's too fast for *me* ! Have *you* any books ?

BLANCHE, thinking.

Any books ?

PAUL.

Any safe ones. They're all impossible here.

BLANCHE.

Impossibly dull ?

PAUL.

Impossibly lively ! They excite a train of thought.

BLANCHE.

In *this* good house—my uncle's ?

PAUL.

I mean for *me*. But I'm not like others—I'm so easily upset !

BLANCHE, looking at him an instant with compassionate assent and interest.
Ah, yes—I know !

PAUL, struck.

You know already ?

BLANCHE.

My uncle has mentioned it.

PAUL, with a sigh of resignation.

Yes, he always mentions it !

BLANCHE.

And Mr. Pitt Brunt had hinted—

PAUL, with a flash of spirit.

Mr. Pitt Brunt ? I'd thank him *not* to hint !

BLANCHE.

He spoke of it kindly—he's sorry for you. I've a charming book upstairs—a railway novel.

PAUL, with a sigh of renunciation.

Ah, railway novels won't do ! Quite forbidden !

BLANCHE, with the same compassion.

They do keep you short !

PAUL, making every concession.

They *have* to, you see. (After an instant.) My propensities, you know.

BLANCHE, grave, impressed.

Are they so awfully marked ?

PAUL.

With big black numbers—one, two, three !

BLANCHE, wondering.

Three ?

PAUL.

Oh, there are more than that ! But don't ask me to count.

BLANCHE.

Not for the world. (Then after an instant, smiling.) *I'll* count !

PAUL.

As you see them appear ? You'll get tired !

BLANCHE.

They don't appear—it seems to me—in your appearance !

PAUL.

Ah, the very worst of them is my duplicity ! But if you know I'm not naturally good, you must also know that I at least struggle to be.

BLANCHE.

Why, I do that myself !

PAUL.

Yes, but you don't fall. I invariably do. I did just now, at my window.

BLANCHE, laughing.

You don't mean you fell out of it !

PAUL.

That would have hurt me less. No. I looked at you—I looked at you in the garden.

BLANCHE.

Oh yes, I went down there—I had finished dressing.

PAUL.

I hadn't—but I unblushingly gazed at you.

BLANCHE.

I didn't see you—I was admiring the garden. It's very lovely.

PAUL, explosive.

Never so lovely as with *you* in it !

BLANCHE.

Oh, Mr. Doubleday !

PAUL.

See how bad I am ! After I had stared a few moments
I came straight down—I followed you in here.

BLANCHE.

But how does that “hurt” you ?

PAUL.

It excites a train of thought.

BLANCHE, laughing.

Like the railway novels ? Thank you !

PAUL.

Mr. Bonsor gave me a tremendous caution.

BLANCHE.

So he did me !

PAUL.

And I gave him a tremendous pledge.

BLANCHE.

Well, I didn't !

PAUL.

Oh, you're free—because you're good !

BLANCHE.

It's better to have passions and control them.

PAUL.

That's just what I didn't do—when I came down here !

BLANCHE, after an instant.

Was it a passion that brought you ?

PAUL.

I don't know what to call it, Miss Amber. It was an emotion not to *be* controlled ! See, I'm getting worse !

BLANCHE, smiling.

You must pull up—you must recover yourself !

PAUL.

I shall try to do so presently ; but, before I begin, let me say this one thing, which was really, I think, the idea that made me break my vow ! I want you to understand my reserve.

BLANCHE, smiling.

I don't *see* your reserve, Mr. Doubleday !

PAUL, quickly, reassuring.

You will in a moment ! Then please remember this, that if I don't speak to you it's because I'm forbidden, and if I don't look at you, it's because I'm afraid.

BLANCHE.

What are you afraid of ?

PAUL.

I'm afraid of myself !

BLANCHE, impressed, taking it very seriously.

You live, then, in such terror ?

PAUL.

Not quite in terror, perhaps, but in very grave anxiety.
I never know what I may do next !

BLANCHE, smiling.

You frighten *me* a little !

PAUL.

Oh, now that I've explained, I shall again put on the mask !

BLANCHE, sighing.

The tragic mask !

PAUL.

Not even that : the expressionless !

BLANCHE.

Well, if you mayn't express, *I* may !

PAUL, a little ironic.

Mustn't you first ask Pitt Brunt ?

BLANCHE.

Never ! *He* has no passions.

PAUL.

Yes, he has an easy life of it.

BLANCHE.

He talked to me just now about the Bill of '86. I attach no importance to the Bill of '86 !

PAUL, vague.

You think it didn't go far enough ?

BLANCHE.

Mr. Brunt says it went too far !

PAUL.

He always thinks everything does. That is doubtless the danger !

BLANCHE, sympathetic.

It's the danger that makes the hero !

PAUL.

Oh, *I'm* not a hero ! I'm too often beaten !

BLANCHE, with pity and curiosity.

The enemy's so strong ?

PAUL.

Overwhelming, Miss Amber !

BLANCHE.

It makes your problem wonderfully interesting—your situation intensely dramatic. I should like immensely to help you !

PAUL.

How *can* you ?

BLANCHE.

By fighting at your side.

PAUL.

In the thick of the fray? You'd be scandalised!

BLANCHE.

Ah, not so easily! I can understand temptation—I can allow for it!

PAUL.

What do you know about it?

BLANCHE, after an instant, quite exalted.

I've felt it!

PAUL.

But always resisted!

BLANCHE, after another hesitation, in the same way.

Not always!

PAUL, with vehemence.

Ah, don't undermine me!

BLANCHE.

Not for the world—but I must look the enemy in the face! (Seeing PITT BRUNT.) Silence!

Re-enter PITT BRUNT from the hall and stands looking an instant from
BLANCHE to PAUL.

PITT BRUNT, to PAUL.

You're not dressed for dinner? (As if with the habit of setting a superior example.) I am!

PAUL.

Oh, *you're* good ! But I'll dress now.

Exit PAUL to the hall.

BLANCHE, with slight irony, to PITT BRUNT.

Yes—you're faultless !

PITT BRUNT, much gratified.

Delighted to hear it from *you*, Miss Amber !

BLANCHE.

You wouldn't be if you knew— (Pauses, as she turns away, with a vague shrug.)

PITT BRUNT.

If I knew what ?

BLANCHE.

That I can enter into—every aberration !

PITT BRUNT, shocked.

Every one ?

BLANCHE, reconsidering.

Well, most ! (Pointing at the door on the left.) What's in there ?

PITT BRUNT.

The library.

BLANCHE.

I'll look at the books.

PITT BRUNT.

They're perfectly unobjectionable.

BLANCHE.

So much the worse !

Exit BLANCHE to the library.

PITT BRUNT.

Awfully paradoxical, but awfully charming !

Re-enter, from the hall, Mrs. FRESHVILLE accompanied by CUBIT.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, to CUBIT.

Don't announce me—go away ! (CUBIT bows obsequiously and exit to the hall. To BRUNT, familiarly.) Dinner-time, eh ?

PITT BRUNT, surprised.

Do you dine with us ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

No, but I suppose *he* does, doesn't he ?

PITT BRUNT, freshly mystified.

Again, madam, I'm in doubt—

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

No matter—I ain't !

PITT BRUNT.

You're very mysterious, but it's attractive ! Whoever the gentleman is, he's dressing.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, looking about her for her reticule.

I'll dress him ! Where's my bag ?

PITT BRUNT.

Your bag?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I forgot it here—it contains treasures. Please produce it.

PITT BRUNT.

Dear madam, how shall I produce it?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

By finding it. I must have it. Look for it.

PITT BRUNT, glancing about.

I am looking; I don't see it!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Look more. Go and ask the butler.

PITT BRUNT.

I usually ring—for a servant.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I don't—I pounce. Try pouncing.

PITT BRUNT, amused.

I often try it in the House!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Then “go for him”—there's a dear!

PITT BRUNT.

Oh, if you put it *that* way—!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, smiling.

I'll put it any way you like !

PITT BRUNT.

You're more and more mysterious !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Not when you know me !

PITT BRUNT, after an instant.

I should be glad to make time to know you.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, gay.

Naughty man ! what would the young lady say ? (Then as he protests.) First see about my bag.

PITT BRUNT, gratified.

I'll see about it.

Exit PITT BRUNT to the hall.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, alone.

The member for Blackport ? There's more in him than meets the eye ! (Then in another tone.) They assemble here for dinner ? Then for my gentleman ! (As she sees CHANTER.) As large as life—in *my* old waistcoat !

Re-enter Captain CHANTER by the lower door on the right ; stopping short, transfixed, appalled.

CHANTER.

Nina ? Horrors ! (Then with a quaver of dismay as she simply stands before him unmistakable and imperturbable.) What does this *mean* ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Can't you imagine?

CHANTER.

Nothing so awful! Go away!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Not without *you*, my duck. I've come for you!

CHANTER, more and more alarmed.

You're mad—you're wicked—you're indecent! They'll all *be* here!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Then you can present me! That's what I've waited for.

CHANTER.

You've waited?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

All the afternoon.

CHANTER.

And who has seen you?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Only one or two, as yet; but the rest shall have the treat.

CHANTER, scared, helpless, going up to look out and coming down.

Nina, do you want to crush me?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Yes, to small pieces. And to pick them up and keep them.

CHANTER.

Keep them in a mortuary urn—you're killing me ! How did you get here ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

The same way as you, I suppose. By the aid of my wits.

CHANTER.

Your wits are remarkable, but they've sadly misled you. You've taken a fatal step !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Fatal, no doubt (whipping out the roll of tapestry she has appropriated in the first scene) to the perpetrator of this !

CHANTER.

You took it ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

To convict you. The last link in the chain !

CHANTER.

Give it back to me !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

To give back to *her* ? Let her give *you* back first
(Then tossing the tapestry away.) Faugh !

CHANTER, distracted.

They're coming ! Let me meet you somewhere else !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, austere.

At the altar, Captain Chanter—to-morrow !

CHANTER.

Make an appointment with me—we'll talk it over !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

We'll talk it over now—it'll save time.

CHANTER.

I can't—I'm faint !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I've no doubt you are !

CHANTER.

For want of food !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Doesn't she give you enough—with the fortune you're hunting so hard? Come with *me* and you shall have plenty !

CHANTER.

There's no such person as you suppose !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Then why are you so afraid she'll see me ?

CHANTER.

There *are* ladies here, but they're innocent— !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I don't suspect them all—*one* will do !

CHANTER.

Who poisoned your mind ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You, and your flagrant bad faith ; your unnatural absences and your still more unnatural explanations. So I sent for the doctor.

CHANTER.

You do run up bills !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I sent for two or three. They had a consultation and found out what was the matter.

CHANTER.

I could have told you for nothing !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

They put their finger on the place !

CHANTER, blank.

What place ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

This place ! They followed you ; they tracked you.

CHANTER.

Detectives ? (Reproachful, bantering.) Oh, bad Nina !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

They showed me the way ! I took it.

CHANTER, with his hand fumbling in his pocket, going up again and coming down, irresolute, desperate, on pins and needles.

Then what'll you take *now* ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Nothing, thanks : I had something at the inn !

CHANTER.

What can I *do* for you ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Redeem your solemn vow—make me your wedded wife !

CHANTER, stands for an instant thinking, covering his face with his hands.

Meet me then—to-morrow. I'll come up to town.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

With the ring in your hand ?

CHANTER.

And bells on my toes—all the jewelry you want !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

My wants are limited to a plain gold circle. And you needn't come up to town—I shall be here.

CHANTER.

If you don't allow me my freedom of action, how can I square her ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Allow me mine. *I'll* square her !

CHANTER.

Don't you see that if you make a scene—? (Checks himself, listening.)

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Well, if I make a scene ?

CHANTER.

Why, I'm nowhere !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Well, *I* ain't—so it doesn't matter ! But I don't mind giving you an hour now—for I flatter myself I've got you !

CHANTER, frightened, as she is going up.

Don't go *that* way—wait !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Wait here ?

CHANTER, still more alarmed.

No, wait *there* ! (Pushing her to the lower door on the right.) Don't come out till we've gone to dinner !

Exit Mrs. FRESHVILLE, hustled out ; on which CHANTER turns, deeply agitated, to meet Mrs. DOUBLEDAY. Re-enter Mrs. DOUBLEDAY from the hall, dressed for dinner.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Where's Mr. Bonsor ?

CHANTER.

I haven't seen him.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Still looking for that woman?

CHANTER, vague, on his guard.

That woman?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Why, Paul's dreadful connection.

CHANTER.

Oh yes! - (To himself.) I wish she *were* Paul's! (Thinks an instant.) Perhaps she *is*! (Then breathless with the happy thought.) That photograph!—she *must* be! (Exultant.) Saved!

Re-enter Mr. BONSOR from the hall, dressed for dinner.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, to Mr. BONSOR.

Did you see her?

MR. BONSOR.

No, I hunted—but I had to dress.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

She'll come back—we'll catch her!

CHANTER, nervous.

Oh, let's have dinner first!

MR. BONSOR.

Where are the young people?

CHANTER, impatient, seeing BLANCHE.

Here's one of them—that's enough!

Re-enter BLANCHE AMBER from the library.

MR. BONSOR.

And where's Pitt Brunt?

BLANCHE.

And where's Mr. Paul?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, reminded, clapping her hand to her pocket.

The key's in my other dress—I quietly locked him in.

BLANCHE, smiling.

He must have escaped—he was here!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, alarmed.

Here?

BLANCHE.

Ten minutes ago.

MR. BONSOR, to Mrs. DOUBLEDAY, severe.

You quietly locked him out!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Mercy—where *is* he then?

Re-enter CUBIT from the hall.

CUBIT, to Mr. BONSOR.

Dinner, sir.

CHANTER, pressing, catching Mrs. DOUBLEDAY by the arm and hurrying her up to the hall.

It doesn't matter—come!

Exeunt Captain CHANTER and Mrs. DOUBLEDAY, and, hurrying after them, Mr. BONSOR and BLANCHE. AS CUBIT is about to follow, re-enter PITT BRUNT from the lawn.

CUBIT.

Dinner, sir.

PITT BRUNT, *resentful*

I've looked for you everywhere.

CUBIT.

Doing my 'air, sir.

PITT BRUNT

Where's that lady?

CUBIT, *blank, giving it up.*

Showed herself out!

PITT BRUNT.

But where's her bag?

CUBIT.

No connection with the luggage, sir.

PITT BRUNT, *mystified.*

I give it up!

Exit PITT BRUNT to the hall.

CUBIT, *alone, glancing about him.*

Where *is* the blessed bag? A liberal reward— (Pauses
as he sees Mrs. FRESHVILLE.)

Re-enter Mrs. FRESHVILLE by the lower door on the right.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, *giving CUBIT, in a business-like way, as soon as she
sees him, another sovereign with which she has already provided herself.*

Add that!

CUBIT, with the sovereign.

Sixpence back, ma'am ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

No—keep it !

CUBIT.

For silence, ma'am ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

For anything you like !

CUBIT, to himself.

Thirty-nine and six !

Exit CUBIT to the hall. Re-enter PAUL DOUBLEDAY from the garden.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, before seeing PAUL.

But my reticule—with the dear old photo ? (Then as PAUL appears.) Gracious powers—the original !

PAUL, staring, amazed, coming down.

Nina ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, with a shriek, throwing herself into his arms.

Dudley !

ACT SECOND

MR. BONSOR'S drawing-room. Mr. BONSOR, at the table, on the left, busily hunting for something, lifting up one object after the other. Enter CUBIT from the hall.

CUBIT.

Did you ring, sir?

MR. BONSOR.

Yes, I want a photograph—a photograph of Mr. Paul.

CUBIT.

Delighted to have him took, sir.

MR. BONSOR.

He has *been* “took,” unfortunately ; and the result, which was placed upon this table yesterday, by Mrs. Double-day, has been surreptitiously removed.

CUBIT.

Never put my hand to anything, sir.

MR. BONSOR.

I wish you'd put your head ! I want Captain Chanter.

CUBIT.

His photograph, sir?

MR. BONSOR.

His presence.

CUBIT.

Here it is, sir.

Enter Captain CHANTER from the hall ; to which exit CUBIT.

MR. BONSOR, opening drawers, to CHANTER.

Did you appropriate that photograph — the one Mrs. Doubleday showed you?

CHANTER, embarrassed.

Oh, the picture of Paul?

MR. BONSOR.

The picture of Dudley ! It has irrecoverably vanished.

CHANTER.

I put it back on the table. (To himself.) Nina recovered it?

MR. BONSOR.

Then who can have taken it?

CHANTER, thinking.

Dudley !

MR. BONSOR.

The record of his shame?

CHANTER, *prompt.*

To cancel his shame.

MR. BONSOR, *severe.*

There must be no cancelling!

CHANTER.

To annihilate the proof.

MR. BONSOR.

There must be no annihilation. We'll get it back.

CHANTER.

I'll get it back! Perhaps you've already heard from Mrs. Doubleday that I've accepted onerous functions.

MR. BONSOR.

It was precisely on the subject of those functions that I desired to converse with you. Mrs. Doubleday has imparted to me her project of a second union.

CHANTER.

I hope you don't regard it as a defection. It doubles the guard!

MR. BONSOR, *with dignity.*

The guard has hitherto been adequate.

CHANTER.

How can you say so in the face of our present alarm?

MR. BONSOR, still with dignity.

It's very good of you to share it !

CHANTER.

I feel strongly that you require relief.

MR. BONSOR, virtuous.

I've never asked for it !

CHANTER.

You're a Stoic—you're a hero ! But remember that Mrs. Doubleday's essentially a woman.

MR. BONSOR.

It's just what I've endeavoured to forget !

CHANTER.

Such endeavours are vain—I never make them.
(Looking at his watch.) Mrs. Doubleday's late—I'm waiting.

MR. BONSOR.

What are you waiting for ?

CHANTER.

To take Paul over.

MR. BONSOR, blank.

Over where ?

CHANTER.

To receive him from her hands. She commits him to me—ceremonially.

MR. BONSOR.

They're preparing, then, for the ceremony.

CHANTER, *grave*.

I've been preparing too.

MR. BONSOR.

In what manner?

CHANTER.

By meditation. We hope you'll assist at it.

MR. BONSOR.

I'll not refuse to show you that I appreciate your singular zeal. The more so that it's manifested in a critical hour.

CHANTER.

It was just the crisis that appealed to me!

MR. BONSOR.

Are you ready to meet it?

CHANTER.

With your inspiring confidence!

MR. BONSOR, *after an instant*.

You *have* it! (They shake hands solemnly; then Mr. BONSOR looks at his watch.) She must be decking him for the solemn rite.

CHANTER.

With ribbons and garlands?

MR. BONSOR.

With sackcloth and ashes.

CHANTER, impatient.

I want to get *at* him !

MR. BONSOR.

It's my individual conviction that he has *been* got at !

CHANTER.

You allude to last evening ?

MR. BONSOR.

While we were at dinner. Just after the member for Blackport had taken his place among us, we were startled by the sound of a remarkable concussion. It seemed to proceed from the drawing-room.

CHANTER.

Which we all invaded—to find it didn't.

MR. BONSOR.

All except Blanche. One of the parties to the encounter had already vanished, but Paul was on the spot.

CHANTER.

Declaring—when examined—that he hadn't laid eyes on any one.

MR. BONSOR.

It's the first time, remarkable to say, that he has ever told an untruth.

CHANTER.

Are you sure it *is* an untruth?

MR. BONSOR.

He was pale, agitated, unnatural.

CHANTER.

He didn't wish to compromise the lady!

MR. BONSOR.

Hadn't she compromised *him*?

CHANTER.

He has no character to lose. But the question shall be probed to the bottom.

MR. BONSOR.

Please probe it!

Re-enter CUBIT from the hall.

CUBIT, announcing.

Mr. Pitt Brunt!

Enter PITT BRUNT from the hall.

MR. BONSOR.

Have you brought your luggage?

PITT BRUNT.

It consists mainly of my quotations—twenty volumes of Hansard.

CHANTER. -

Your quotations must be singularly copious !

MR. BONSOR, to CHANTER.

He will contribute to those of posterity. (To CUBIT.)
Arrange the twenty volumes.

PITT BRUNT, to CUBIT.

Chronologically !

Exit CUBIT to the hall.

MR. BONSOR, to CHANTER.

The member for Blackport is to meet his electors.

PITT BRUNT.

I'm writing my speech—and trying it on Mr. Bonsor.

CHANTER.

I hope it'll be a comfortable fit. I'll not interfere with
the process.

Exit Captain CHANTER by the lower door on the right.

MR. BONSOR, to BRUNT.

It will save time to have you in the house. And then
there's another reason.

PITT BRUNT, as BLANCHE appears.

Here's the other reason ! (Enter BLANCHE AMBER from the hall
with a railway novel in her hand.) Good morning. I've come to
stay !

BLANCHE.

I'm very happy, this morning, to feel that that's just what I've done!

PITT BRUNT.

Isn't it a remarkably interesting house?

BLANCHE.

Fascinating! (Mr. BONSOR and PITT BRUNT look at each other, and BLANCHE considers a moment the cover of her railway novel. Then she speaks abruptly.) Dear uncle! (Holding out her book.) Is *that* improper?

MR. BONSOR, with the book, looking at the cover with his glasses.
A lady and gentleman, engaged—

BLANCHE.

Oh, they're not engaged!

PITT BRUNT, interested.

What are they doing?

MR. BONSOR.

Embracing! (Dubious, disapproving, while he still looks.) If they're not engaged—

PITT BRUNT.

They ought to be! (To BLANCHE.) Every one who isn't ought to be.

BLANCHE.

From a sense of duty? I'm afraid I've no conscience.
(To Mr. BONSOR.) May I lend that book to Mr. Paul?

MR. BONSOR, looking at her severely over his glasses.

The question exemplifies your deficiency !

PITT BRUNT.

You may lend it to *me*.

BLANCHE, taking the book back.

You wouldn't understand it !

MR. BONSOR.

You've got your Hansard.

Re-enter CUBIT from the hall.

CUBIT, to BRUNT.

I think I've set them straight, sir.

MR. BONSOR.

Chronologically ?

CUBIT, blank an instant.

No, sir, on their sides.

MR. BONSOR, to BRUNT.

Go and see.

PITT BRUNT, smiling to BLANCHE.

I must make them sit up !

Exit PITT BRUNT to the hall. Exit CUBIT.

MR. BONSOR.

He makes the House !

BLANCHE, tossing down her book.

Isn't he supposed to know *anything* ?

MR. BONSOR, who has taken up the book.

The member for Blackport?

BLANCHE.

The prisoner of Chillon!

MR. BONSOR.

He's supposed to know too much! The harm's done, but we endeavour to prevent its spreading. (He goes to the cabinet on the right, opens it and, seeing Mrs. FRESHVILLE's reticule, which he has put away there, considers an instant, and then, as if with a happy thought, plumps the book into it. To himself.) Just do for *her*!

BLANCHE, who has not seen this proceeding; musing, objecting.

He seems after all to *do* nothing!

MR. BONSOR, triumphant.

What did he do last night?

BLANCHE.

I haven't the least idea. (Then after an instant.) But I should like to help you!

MR. BONSOR, suspicious.

Everyone would like to "help" me!

BLANCHE.

You must double the guard!

MR. BONSOR.

That's what they *all* say!

BLANCHE.

It shows there's something in it !

MR. BONSOR.

There may be something in it, but it's not what I sent for you for.

BLANCHE, turning away with a groan.

Ah, dear uncle, I know what you sent for me for !

MR. BONSOR.

The member for Blackport's the Idol of the North !

BLANCHE.

The idol should remain in his temple.

MR. BONSOR, indignant.

What would the House do without him ?

BLANCHE.

Perhaps it would wake up !

MR. BONSOR.

The House *is* his temple ! He's the young man of the hour.

BLANCHE.

Do you mean of the dinner-hour ?

MR. BONSOR.

There's not a question of the day that he has not made his own.

BLANCHE.

Well, dear uncle, as *I'm* not the question of the day—

MR. BONSOR.

You would none the less have your appointed place.
His private life would be worthy of his public.

BLANCHE.

But should *I* be worthy of his private?

MR. BONSOR.

Let him read you his momentous speech.

BLANCHE.

Is it very long?

MR. BONSOR.

Not yet; but it will be. It's growing fast.

BLANCHE, smiling.

Then I'll take it when it's little. (In another tone.) But, all the same, I'm interested in Mr. Paul.

MR. BONSOR, disconcerted.

"Interested"?

BLANCHE.

I regard him as an object of charity.

MR. BONSOR.

Why so? His wants are provided for!

BLANCHE.

There are wants and wants. Why not let him have—

MR. BONSOR, as she pauses, thinking.

Let him have what?

BLANCHE.

One's scraps of leisure—one's ideas of life.

MR. BONSOR.

He's not a person for you to meet on a social basis.

BLANCHE.

Oh, I want to approach him in a missionary spirit.

MR. BONSOR.

You won't convert him.

BLANCHE.

Perhaps not. (Smiling.) But I'll clothe him!

MR. BONSOR.

That *is* the first proper step; but have you the material?

BLANCHE, laughing.

Yards and yards and yards!

Re-enter Captain CHANTER from the lower door on the right.

CHANTER.

Have they come?

MR. BONSOR.

'They've come.

Enter Mrs. DOUBLEDAY and PAUL from the hall while BLANCHE and
CHANTER converse.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, perceiving this.

Captain ! (CHANTER instantly quits BLANCHE and comes to her, a movement which leaves PAUL exposed. As BLANCHE moves a little nearer to PAUL Mrs. DOUBLEDAY resumes.) Paul !

PAUL, startled, coming down to her.

Mamma ?

Re-enter from the hall PITT BRUNT, with several volumes of Hansard under one arm and a portfolio under the other.

PITT BRUNT, to Mr. BONSOR.

May I work in the library ?

MR. BONSOR, assenting.

My niece will assist you.

PITT BRUNT.

Oh, Miss Amber !

MR. BONSOR.

She's eager to listen to your speech.

PITT BRUNT.

She *shall* ! (Then looking round complacently at the company.)
Perhaps you'd *all* like to listen.

PAUL, very prompt.

Mamma, would it be safe for *me*?

PITT BRUNT, smiling.

It wouldn't if you had to reply to me!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

He's never allowed to reply!

CHANTER, to BRUNT.

An arrangement is pending by which I shall henceforth answer *for* him. But I'm afraid that, for the present, we must occupy ourselves exclusively with this arrangement.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Before we enter upon it, I beg Mr. Bonsor to mention—

MR. BONSOR, blank, while she pauses as if from delicacy.

To mention—?

CHANTER.

The nature of the connection about to be formed.

BLANCHE, eager.

Matrimonial?

PAUL, struck, echoing.

Matrimonial!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, with reprobation.

Paul!

BLANCHE, wondering.

Is that *not* the nature of the connection?

MR. BONSOR, with reprobation.

Blanche!

BLANCHE, to PAUL, smiling.

But it must be either one thing or the other, musn't it?

PAUL.

I'm never allowed to reply.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

You will therefore receive without comment—

MR. BONSOR, as she hesitates.

As *I* have done—

CHANTER.

The news of your mother's intended marriage—

BLANCHE, as he hesitates.

To Captain Chanter, I'm sure.

PAUL, struck, precipitate.

The Captain?—By jingo!

MR. BONSOR, privately, to Mrs. DOUBLEDAY.

He *hadn't* taken it in!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

We never crossed the line.

MR. BONSOR.

It excites a train of thought.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

That was just our scruple.

MR. BONSOR.

He thinks it relieves him.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, emphatic.

It doesn't !

PITT BRUNT, gay, to Mrs. DOUBLEDAY.

I'm sorry for Mr. Bonsor ! (To Mr. BONSOR, summarily presenting the Hansards in a pile.) Just take these.

MR. BONSOR, vague, but receiving the Hansards.

What am I to do with them ?

PITT BRUNT, prompt.

Verify.

MR. BONSOR.

Can't *you* verify ?

PITT BRUNT.

I must give my attention to Miss Amber.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Miss Amber had better give hers to *us* !

BLANCHE.

With pleasure, Mrs. Doubleday.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

To see Paul committed.

PAUL, alarmed.

Committed?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I'm going to make you over.

PAUL, rueful.

You've been trying that all my life!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

This time I shall succeed. I deliver you to the Captain.

CHANTER, passing between Mrs. DOUBLEDAY and PAUL.

I beg to acknowledge receipt!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, to PAUL.

You're to look up to him as you've looked up to *me*.

CHANTER.

I become, as it were, your second mother.

MR. BONSOR.

As I've been, as it were, your second father!

PAUL, resigned, bewildered.

I seem to have plenty of relations!

BLANCHE.

Shouldn't you like a sister thrown in?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

The family is quite large enough! (Privately to CHANTER.)
I wanted her to take it in!

CHANTER.

She *shall* take it in!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, who has extracted a small coin from her portemonnaie.
Let me hand you this.

CHANTER, with the coin, vague.

Sixpence?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

His allowance.

CHANTER.

It doesn't pass through his hands?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

We apply it to some benevolent object.

CHANTER, pocketing the sixpence.

It shall be devoted to a worthy one!

MR. BONSOR, to CHANTER.

You'll find your place no sinecure.

CHANTER, virtuous.

No—but Mrs. Doubleday will breathe!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Not yet—I disseminate the news.

CHANTER.

You rush up to London?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I rush to my writing-desk.

Exit Mrs. DOUBLEDAY to the hall.

PITT BRUNT, to Mr. BONSOR.

I sent the others to your room.

MR. BONSOR.

Most kind of you.

PITT BRUNT.

Thirteen volumes—to verify.

MR. BONSOR, going up.

I'll verify.

PITT BRUNT.

You're forgetting these. (Takes and presents again those he has brought in.) Twenty in all.

MR. BONSOR, impressive, to BLANCHE, as he takes the pile in his two arms.
The Idol of the North!

Exit Mr. BONSOR to the hall with the books.

PITT BRUNT, gracious, opening the door of the library to BLANCHE.
He's ready to mount his pedestal.

BLANCHE.

Do you want me to hold it while you get on?

PITT BRUNT, smiling.

It won't run away!

BLANCHE.

I wish *you* would!

PITT BRUNT, arch, at the door of the library.

For you to run after me?

Exit PITT BRUNT.

CHANTER, looking from BLANCHE to PAUL a moment, then reflecting,
deciding and taking two half-crowns out of his pocket.

Let me hand you this!

PAUL, with the money, surprised.

Five shillings?

CHANTER.

Your allowance.

PAUL.

Four and sixpence too much!

CHANTER.

I change the system—I increase the sum!

PAUL, helpless, appealing.

What shall I *do* with it?

CHANTER, gay, cynical.

Whatever you like!

BLANCHE, looking from PAUL to CHANTER ; then resolutely, as if with a sudden inspiration.

Captain Chanter, will you leave me a moment with Mr. Paul ?

CHANTER.

Do you want to rifle him ?

BLANCHE.

I want to advise him !

CHANTER.

As much as you like !

Exit Captain CHANTER by the lower door on the right.

PAUL, amazed, quite scandalised, looking after CHANTER while he puts the money in his waistcoat-pocket.

I can't look up to *him* !

BLANCHE, laughing.

He inspires me with positive reverence !

PAUL.

Mamma wouldn't have left me with you !

BLANCHE.

I wouldn't have asked her !

PAUL.

Mr. Bonsor wouldn't have done it either !

BLANCHE.

I wouldn't have asked him !

PAUL.

You knew your man, eh?

BLANCHE.

I divined him!

PAUL.

You just took a shot!

BLANCHE.

You see it succeeded.

PAUL.

Yes, isn't it awful?

BLANCHE.

Ah, don't say that when I'm fighting at your side!

PAUL.

Thanks—but you do undermine me!

BLANCHE.

Why, if I asked him to go it was on purpose to prop you up.

PAUL.

It's just when you prop me, you know, that I seem most to come down!

BLANCHE.

Don't think of me as a mere young lady; think of me as an invalid's attendant—as a doctor—as a district nurse.

PAUL.

A sort of sister of charity, eh ?

BLANCHE.

Yes, but not in the least of a strict order.

PAUL.

Strict orders are issued to me daily !

BLANCHE.

Oh, I shall be easy with you, for I know you're in trouble.

PAUL, anxious, looking round.

Indeed I *am* in trouble !

BLANCHE.

Your wild past comes back to you.

PAUL.

It came back last night. But it only stayed a minute.

BLANCHE.

Such minutes must be wonderful !

PAUL.

They do upset one !

BLANCHE.

They make you feel you live !

PAUL.

Yes, but in the tomb of my reputation.

BLANCHE.

Ah, you're not buried ; your tomb is open to the sky. You see the sun and the stars ; you feel the wind and the weather !

PAUL.

The wind and the weather very much, Miss Amber. I shouldn't wonder if I were taking cold !

BLANCHE.

What of that ? You won't, at least, have vegetated !
(Then as she goes.) *I shall !*

PAUL.

Where are you going ?

BLANCHE.

To study to be a cabbage !

PAUL.

Well, it's simpler !

BLANCHE.

Oh, I shall be simple. I should say the penny kind !

PAUL.

Meanwhile I must continue the struggle.

BLANCHE.

Yes, till you can fight no more !

PAUL.

And *when* I can fight no more ?

BLANCHE, at the door of the library, considering.

I'll tell you then what to do !

Exit BLANCHE.

PAUL, alone.

Yes, I shan't have vegetated ! I should have been only yesterday the ornament of a kitchen-garden, but *her* hand has plucked me up ! (Then, as he sees Mrs. FRESHVILLE.) For *hers* to prepare me for the table ?

Enter Mrs. FRESHVILLE from the hall.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, breathless, hurrying down.

Dudley !

PAUL, who has receded to the door of the library, looking at her in melancholy contemplation.

Nina

MRS. FRESHVILLE, stopping short in the middle of the stage.

No hug for Nina ?

PAUL, checking her with his finger to his lips.

When we hug they hear it !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Did they hear it last night ?

PAUL.

Distinctly. They rushed in. Fortunately you had rushed out.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Yes, my boy, you did bundle me !

PAUL.

How did you get in now?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

The same way as before. I've bought the butler.

PAUL.

Cubit must be rather expensive!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

A pound a visit.

PAUL.

It comes pretty high.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

About the same as a high-class doctor. But, my dear child, I consider you worth it! (Looking at him a moment.) You do look so fresh!

PAUL, uneasy, distressed.

Nina, I beg you not to allude to my appearance!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Why should you be ashamed of it? You look awfully young.

PAUL.

I *feel* awfully young!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Taken care of yourself, eh?

PAUL.

I should say, rather, I have been taken care of !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Well, *I* haven't ! How do *I* look ?

PAUL.

You look like somebody else.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You think I've a different type ?

PAUL.

Haven't you got different hair ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Oh yes ; it used to be red.

PAUL.

My dear, it used to be black !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Oh, black, was it ? Red the year before. But your's, darling, is the same !

PAUL.

My hair may be the same, Nina, but everything else is changed.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Yes, everything does change, Dudley !

PAUL.

One's very name, to begin with. I'm not Dudley now !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, surprised.

Then what *are* you, pray ?

PAUL.

A mere anonymous nobody !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, in friendly compassion.

It's all over, eh ?

PAUL.

It was over long ago !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Short and sweet, eh ? (Then as he checks her again, listening, with his finger to his lips.) What's the matter ?

PAUL.

I thought they were coming !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, undisturbed.

But they ain't, eh ?

PAUL.

I hope not. I'm trying to be good.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

So am I ; but I'm not very sure it pays !

PAUL, struck, suppliant.

Ah, Nina, don't say that !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Why not, if it's true? You live up to a standard because you think some others do; and after you've had all the worry—

PAUL, as she pauses.

Yes, Nina?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Why, you find they don't!

PAUL, wondering.

Don't they really?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

See what an awful sell! You go spinning along the path of virtue, and if at the end of the run you happen to look back, what do you see?

PAUL.

I never look back!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

All of them sitting down!

PAUL.

I never sit down!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Partaking freely of refreshment.

PAUL.

I never partake!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

No more do I ; but I feel the want of it !

PAUL.

You have your equivalent : you've acquired the habit of virtue.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Yes, that's the worst of it : you've got to go on.

PAUL.

Let me earnestly entreat you to do so !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I'm going on ; that's what has brought me here !

PAUL.

Yes, on the railroad of virtue this is certainly a lively station ! But how did you find it out ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

By the aid of the police.

PAUL, alarmed.

The police ? Are *they* after me ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You, my dear fellow ? I didn't come for *you* !

PAUL, blank.

Who did you come for ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Ain't there *another* rascal on the premises?

PAUL, amazed.

Mr. Bonsor?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Try again!

PAUL.

Captain Chanter? (Then perceiving her assent.) The police
are after *him*?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Not now—but *I* am! It's better.

PAUL.

What do you want of him?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I want to marry him.

PAUL.

Marry him? Why, he's engaged!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Right you are—to *me*.

PAUL, stupefied.

You and my mother?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Is she your mother?

PAUL.

My stepmother.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

That monster?

PAUL.

Don't abuse her, Nina—she's my guardian!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Your guardian? (Struck.) Are *you* the common object?

PAUL, blank.

The common object?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

That I heard about yesterday—such a peculiar case.

PAUL.

I *am* a peculiar case!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You're vicious, eh?

PAUL.

Fundamentally!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, dubious.

So bad you require *two* of them?

PAUL.

I require three—with the Captain.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, amazed

Is *he* one ?

PAUL.

He looks after my morals.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

And who looks after his ?

PAUL, wondering, artless.

Why, I thought they were perfect !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

So did I. But they ain't !

PAUL, thinking.

That won't suit Mamma !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Then let her drop him !

PAUL.

That won't suit *him* !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

He's too particular. Leave him to *me*.

PAUL, anxious.

And what'll you do with him ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Do with him? (After an instant, considering.) See he lets you alone.

PAUL, anxious.

Then what'll become of me?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I'll look after you myself!

PAUL, astonished.

After both of us?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

It will be all one job! (After looking at him a moment.) As for you—I don't believe it!

PAUL.

Don't believe what?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Why, that you're a peculiar case.

PAUL.

Then look at the evidence!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Hang the evidence! Try—and see.

PAUL.

Try? Try what?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Try everything !

PAUL.

Why, everything's wrong !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You are, my dear, to begin with ! Everything's right !

PAUL, bewildered.

Everything's deuced awkward, at any rate !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Your dear old face, as you say that, comes back to me !

PAUL.

Don't let it, Nina—for heaven's sake send it away !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

With that sweet little waxed moustache. What have you done with the ends ?

PAUL.

They've followed those of all the candles and cigars !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

The burnt-out fires ?—the withered flowers ? You always had a lovely buttonhole.

PAUL.

I've given up buttonholes—they look too dissolute.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Dissolute?—the flowers of the field? I never heard of such rot!

PAUL.

Neither have I, Nina! But they wouldn't like me to say so.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

"They"? Mamma and the Captain?

PAUL.

Perhaps the Captain wouldn't object—

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I should like to see him!

PAUL.

But such an expression wouldn't go unrebuked by Mr. Bonsor.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

The old busybody who chased you to Paris?

PAUL, *prompt.*

Oh, *he* was my father! (*Then struck.*) Gracious, what have I said?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

The simple truth. They did make a rumpus about nothing!

PAUL.

Not exactly nothing!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Nothing worth speaking of!

PAUL.

I don't speak of it!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

But they do still, eh?

PAUL.

To every one they see!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

To the Captain, do you suppose?

PAUL.

Oh, above all to the Captain!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, after consideration.

Well, that's no matter. He doesn't know it was me.

PAUL.

He'll find it out.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I don't care if he does!

PAUL.

Not if he wants to marry you?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

He doesn't!

PAUL, reasoning, perplexed.

Still—if he's engaged—?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

He's engaged to your mamma. If he can stand your mamma, he can stand me.

PAUL.

But how can he marry you both?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Trust him to manage it—if it's necessary! But it ain't necessary.

PAUL.

I'm glad of that!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

He'll chuck your mamma.

PAUL, rueful.

So that I shall receive her on the rebound?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, struck, compassionate.

No, that won't do, you poor dear, will it? (After another instant, sociable.) We did hit it off, me and you, didn't we, Dud?

PAUL.

I confess I was rather afraid of you.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You've got over that, I hope!

PAUL.

I think I'm gaining confidence.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

So am I, though you gave me, last night, a turn.

PAUL.

I didn't sleep a wink !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Nor me, fancy ! I thought of the old days—of the way I used to sing to you !

PAUL, beguiled.

Do you remember your old songs ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, eager.

Should you like to hear one ?

PAUL, suddenly alarmed.

Heavens, no !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, as he goes up, on his guard.

They're out of fashion now ; they've got a new lot !

PAUL, coming down.

Are you still at the Waterloo ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Dear, no ; bless the old shop !

PAUL, after an instant, gentle.

Your voice was very sweet, Nina.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

So was yours, old chap. Do you still sing?

PAUL, aghast.

Sing? Why, I scarcely speak!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I remember how little you thought of your own powers. You only wanted *me* to develop!

PAUL.

I'm bound to say you did develop!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Through the course of instruction you so liberally provided. It was for that we went to Paris.

PAUL, recalling, recognising.

Yes, it was simply for that!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Our musical studies. Where was the awful harm?

PAUL, thinking.

After all, where *was* it?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

We simply went in for a thorough course.

PAUL.

We thought it our duty to hear what they were doing.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, *reminiscent, wistful.*

Ah, they do such a lot! What was that place? The Alcazar!

PAUL.

And that other? The Eldorado!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

And the Valentino!

PAUL.

And the Solferino!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

That was where at last they collared us!

PAUL, *starting, seeing CHANTER.*

They've collared us again!

Re-enter Captain CHANTER, with a yellow-covered French novel and a box of cigars, by the lower door on the right.

CHANTER, *bland.*

Good morning, Mrs. Freshville.

PAUL, *surprised.*

Is that your name now?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, *ominous, looking at CHANTER.*

Not the one he generally uses! Didn't I mention that I've been married?

CHANTER, smiling.

You must have had so much else to say ! (To PAUL.)
She belongs to the category of irresistible widows.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

But not to the most irresistible part of it. (With intensity, to
CHANTER.) Those with five thousand a year.

PAUL, to CHANTER ; still meek and respectful, but explanatory and lucid.
I've had the pleasure of some previous acquaintance
with Mrs. Freshville.

CHANTER, genial.

My dear fellow, I know all about it !

PAUL, to Mrs. FRESHVILLE, rueful.

He knows all about it !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I don't care a rap what he knows !

CHANTER, frank and gay.

I shall make you care ! (To PAUL, sociable, handing the cigar-box.)
Have a Regalia ?

PAUL, looking at the cigars hard an instant, then hard at CHANTER, as if to
fathom his tortuous ways.

What will Mamma say ?

CHANTER, smiling, tempting.

I won't tell her ! (PAUL, hesitating, takes a cigar out of the case, turns away with it and stands a moment looking at it. CHANTER, meanwhile, selects one for himself. PAUL, suddenly, with a nervous movement, jerks away his own cigar, tosses it on a table and goes up, uneasily, nervously. CHANTER, lighting a cigar, continues to Mrs. FRESHVILLE.) Shall I offer *you* one ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, with her hand on her pocket.

I've got my cigarettes ! (Feeling.) No, I haven't ; they're in my reticule. (Looking, with renewed despair, about her.) Where the dickens *is* it ?

CHANTER, cool, without moving.

Don't mind. I'll find it ! (Then to PAUL.) I say, here's a book for you.

PAUL, eager, coming down.

A book ?

CHANTER, handing him his yellow-covered volume.

A little French novel !

PAUL, timid, taking the book.

Zola ?

CHANTER, puffing his cigar.

Zola !

PAUL, gazing at the cover.

What will Mamma say ?

CHANTER.

I won't tell her !

Paul turns away slowly, with his novel, as he has done with his cigar, and looks in the same way at the cover without opening it. Then he tosses it down, as he has tossed his cigar, and goes up, with the same nervous movement, to stand an instant at the window and look out at the lawn.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, seated, to CHANTER.

Ain't you ashamed, you horrid thing ?

CHANTER.

Ain't you, you designing woman ? (Then as he draws a pack of cards from his pocket and holds it out to PAUL.) I say, choose a card.

PAUL, alert, coming down.

A card ?

CHANTER.

One of these.

PAUL.

What will Mamma say ?

CHANTER

I won't tell her !

PAUL, looking at the cards, fascinated but hesitating.

What are you doing ?

CHANTER.

A little trick. Take any you like. (As PAUL draws out a card.) What is it ?

PAUL.

The Queen of Hearts !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, seated.

Graceful allusion to *me*!

CHANTER.

Please keep it till I take it back.

PAUL turns away in the same manner as before, stops, looks irresolutely at the card, then gets rid of it as he has done of the cigar and the book.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, to CHANTER, nodding at his pack.

My old pack?

CHANTER, vague.

Yours?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

The one we generally use.

CHANTER.

I just sent out to buy it. (Then after he has placed the cards well in evidence on the table.) Dudley!

PAUL, more dryly, coming down.

Sir?

CHANTER.

Will you do me a favour? You'll find on the table in my room—

PAUL, anxious, as CHANTER pauses.

I shall find—?

CHANTER.

A flask of brandy.

PAUL, blank.

What shall I do with it?

CHANTER.

Anything you like!

PAUL, horrified.

Captain, have mercy on me!

CHANTER.

Then bring it here to me! (As PAUL looks at him in a silent appeal, he adds.) Do get it, old fellow!

PAUL, divided, to Mrs. FRESHVILLE.

Shall I get it?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Oh, *I* don't care what mamma says!

PAUL, after another instant, snapping his fingers.

No more then do I!

Exit PAUL DOUBLEDAY to the hall.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, rising, abrupt.

Are the invitations out?

CHANTER.

I haven't the faintest idea what you mean!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

For your marriage to that old dragon.

CHANTER.

I suppose I may keep a secret—after discovering that you've nurtured one for years.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

All the more that *yours* is so horrid! Dudley liked me, and I liked him, and I'm not ashamed of it. I was grateful to him for his interest in my voice.

CHANTER, *sarcastic*.

Oh, your voice!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Don't sniff at it—*you* were glad enough to hear it!

CHANTER.

And to which of us, this morning, have you come here to sing?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You'll understand when I tell you that though last night I had engaged my room at the inn, I went back to town for my music.

CHANTER.

Your music?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Perhaps I ought to say yours! Your notes of hand.

CHANTER.

The stuff I wrote you? (*Thinking.*) You can't make a scene with my letters now.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Why ain't it a happy moment?

CHANTER.

Simply because you'll do for Dudley.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I don't mind that—if I do for you!

CHANTER

Where *are* the few lines I inadvertently traced?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

There are enough of them to stuff out my pocket.
(As he looks at her, up and down, askance.) You needn't crouch
for a spring—I'll fight for them!

CHANTER, nervous, throwing away his cigar.

You're criminally vulgar!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I often think it's a comfort! But I feel as if I had a
small family in my pocket, and now I should like my
reticule.

CHANTER goes to the cupboard on the right, in which Mr. BONSOR has placed
the reticule, and takes it out. He brings it to her and she receives it and
opens it. She pulls out BLANCHE'S railway novel, which Mr. BONSOR has
put into it, and looks at the book with surprise. Then she flings it down
on the table.

That book's not mine!

CHANTER, taking up the book.

Who's is it? (Reading the name on the title-page.) Blanche
Amber?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, who has fumbled in the reticule, in dismay.
And the photo's gone!

CHANTER.

The photo?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, looking about her, vexed.
Dudley's!

CHANTER.

Was it in there?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I carry it about.

CHANTER.

And what do you do with mine?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Lock it up at home! Where *is* the confounded thing?

CHANTER, still with BLANCHE'S book.
Some one obviously sneaked it.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, vague.
Who the mischief—?

CHANTER.

The person who left this instead.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

That nasty book? Who *is* the brute?

CHANTER.

The brute is Miss Blanche Amber.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, recalling.

The girl who arrived yesterday?

CHANTER.

Just in time to grab it!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

The one who's engaged to the public man?

CHANTER.

The member for Blackport? They're not engaged quite yet.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

He's awfully spoony.

CHANTER.

Well, *she* isn't! (After a moment.) I'll get the photograph back from her.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Very good of you. Get it immediately.

CHANTER.

You must give me time—she'll cleave to it!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Cleave to my property—the horrid little thief?

CHANTER.

You must allow for her feelings!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, *vague*.

What feelings, pray?

CHANTER.

Why, she's in love with him!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

With Dudley? Since when?

CHANTER, *with assurance*.

Since yesterday! He makes them toe the mark!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Does he make them steal?

CHANTER.

He makes them do anything!

He goes up rapidly to the window as soon as he has spoken; while Mrs. FRESHVILLE sinks slowly again into the chair from which she has risen, and, with her reticule open on her knees, transfers to it mechanically, with an air of intense preoccupation, one by one, a dozen loose letters that she has taken from her pocket. She takes them out successively, looking at the snperscriptions.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, *who has counted the letters and fastened her reticule*.
Thirteen, and five telegrams!

CHANTER, who has stood uneasily at the window, coming down, looking at his watch.

Give me half an hour, and I'll bring you the photo at the inn !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, rising again, smiling, with the reticule on her arm.
In exchange for your letters ? Too dear !

CHANTER.

Oh, bother my letters—do what you like with them !
Make any row your bad taste may suggest, but for heaven's sake let it be a row that won't hurt Dudley !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Hurt him—how ?

CHANTER.

By showing that you and he are at it again !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

We ain't at it again !

CHANTER.

You present an appearance of it that won't improve his situation.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

His situation's a farce !

CHANTER.

So it is, but you must sit the farce out.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

And you? Were *you* sitting it out just now?

CHANTER.

- Oh, I'm in the performance.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

As the leading villain? You corrupt his innocence?

CHANTER.

His innocence is a thin veneer. Scratch the Russian and you find the Tartar—scratch Paul and you find Dudley!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Well, if you scratch him again I'll scratch *you*, I can promise you!

CHANTER.

I'm weak with him—I humour him—I spoil him: all that I admit. But that's nothing compared to the mess that you'll make for him by compromising him.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, after a moment.

You're a mass of deceit, but I don't see what you'll gain by not bringing me the photo.

CHANTER, pressing, watchful.

I swear to you I'll bring it in half an hour. I hear some one coming!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, thinking.

Poor dear old Dud ! (Then to CHANTER.) It's a pity you're such a fiend !

CHANTER, pleading, feverish.

Don't *you* be one—don't sacrifice him !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, looking at her watch.

In half an hour ?

CHANTER.

To the minute !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You're unspeakable—but I've got you *here* ! (She slaps her reticule triumphantly and goes up.)

CHANTER, who is up before her, listening by the door of the hall and checking her.

Wait !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, indicating the lower door on the right.

I won't go in *there* again !

CHANTER, passing quickly to the window.

This way ! It's an escape !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, as she goes ; warning.

Not for *you* !

Exit Mrs. FRESHVILLE to the lawn.

CHANTER, alone, exhausted but exultant.

She has "got" me, eh ? Not quite so tight as I've got *her* !

Re-enter PAUL DOUBLEDAY from the hall with a silver-mounted travelling-flask.

PAUL, tossing the flask down.

There !

CHANTER, taking it up and shaking it as he smiles at PAUL.

You haven't drunk it up ?

PAUL, looking about him after a gesture of disgusted repudiation.

She's gone ?

CHANTER, laying the flask on a table.

Thank our stars !

PAUL, breaking out.

I say, you know—what are you up to ?

CHANTER, with sudden wild gestures.

I'm in a fever—I'm in a frenzy : my head goes round !

(As PAUL stares at him, bewildered.) I don't know what I say—
I don't know what I do !

PAUL, after a moment.

You seem indeed in an extraordinary position !

CHANTER.

Dudley, I throw myself on your mercy !

PAUL.

If you really want it, don't call me Dudley.

CHANTER.

I'll call you anything you like if you'll only help me.

PAUL.

How on earth can I help you?

CHANTER.

By your generous influence. I was an ass to yield to her!

PAUL.

To yield to Mamma?

CHANTER.

No, *that* was inevitable.

PAUL.

So I've always found it!

CHANTER.

I succumbed—originally—to Nina.

PAUL.

It wasn't original! Where did you meet her?

CHANTER, waving away inquiries.

Oh, in society! She has my written vows.

PAUL, struck.

I wonder if she has mine!

CHANTER.

Oh, yours don't matter!

PAUL.

Don't they, though!

CHANTER.

They *shan't* matter, Paul, if you'll save me !

PAUL.

How on earth can I save you ?

CHANTER.

As I tell you, by squaring her.

PAUL, vague.

Squaring Mrs. Doubleday ?

CHANTER.

Squaring Mrs. Freshville ! (More agitated the more he thinks.)
It's quite too awful !

PAUL, considering.

How far have you gone with her ?

CHANTER.

With Mrs. Freshville ? Very far indeed. I once went to Brighton.

PAUL.

Oh, *I* went to Paris !

CHANTER.

I know you did ; so you can feel for me ! (Going up.)
Keep her quiet !

PAUL.

Where are you going ?

CHANTER, with wild gestures.

Away—away !

PAUL.

Who then will keep *me* quiet ?

CHANTER.

You mustn't *be* quiet ; you must act !

PAUL, staring, wondering.

Act ?

CHANTER.

Save me ! By-bye !

Exit CHANTER rapidly to the hall.

PAUL, alone, still blank.

That's all very well ; but who'll save *me* ? (He moves about during the rest of his soliloquy, looking round him, wonderingly, interrogatively, as he sifts his situation in his mind, taking up successively and laying down again the different objects he mentions.) I'm in dreadful danger, I suppose ! I *must* be, for I'm face to face with everything that, for years, I've been taught to dread—*have* dreaded. Tobacco, cards, wine, (then taking up the French novel) women ! Here they are—all in a row ! (Looking round him.) The real thing—and I'm alone with them ! I'm therefore free, ain't I ? free as I haven't been since— Ah, when *was* it ? It seems only yesterday ; yet it seems another life ! (With the different objects again.) Women, wine, cards, tobacco ! (As he tosses the cigar into the box again.) Temptation, ain't it ? Yes, it *must* be : what else can it be ? I'm tempted ! The danger's right here at last—the danger

of the happy chance! Well, the happy chance is just what I can't resist. (After a moment.) Is it, indeed? Pray, *why* can't I? (Standing off with his hands in his pockets, looking at the different things.) Because I'm the slave of my passions, and my passions, alas, are awful! (Taking up the flask of liquor.) This, for instance—this is one of my passions. (He has uncorked the flask; he smells it.) Do I yearn for it? Somehow I don't feel as if I did! Could I even raise it to my lips? (After an instant.) What's the matter with me that I can't? (Still with the flask in his hand.) I'm wicked—I'm weak—I can't be trusted; and yet my funny fate takes it into her head to trust me! She treats me all of a sudden with flattering confidence. (Thinking.) It may be a trap of my funny fate. But if it's a trap, I ain't caught! I *am* resisting; I *have* resisted. (Following up his induction.) I ain't so bad, then, now; I must be getting better! (Still standing with the uncorked flask in his hand, he sees PITT BRUNT. Re-enter PITT BRUNT from the library; to whom, as the idea last uttered comes over him, he breaks out spontaneously, joyously, artlessly.) I say, Brunt, I'm getting better!

PITT BRUNT, with his pen stuck into his ear, surprised at the image PAUL presents with his uncorked flask, approaches him as if supposing him intoxicated. He takes the flask from him and smells it; then, in horror at its contents, replaces it in his hand, looking at him with high superiority.

PITT BRUNT.

On brandy? (He crosses to the lower door on the right, where he pauses an instant and gives PAUL another look of shocked reprobation.) Out of the very bottles?

Exit PITT BRUNT by the lower door on the right.

PAUL, alone, stares, reflects a moment, then corks and puts down his flask with a sigh of resignation, taking up mechanically the French novel.

No one will ever believe it !

Re-enter BLANCHE AMBER from the library.

BLANCHE, at the door.

Are you still alone ?

PAUL.

More alone than ever.

BLANCHE.

Then I'll come in.

PAUL.

Do ; *he* won't mind !

BLANCHE.

Do you mean the member for Blackport ?

PAUL.

Oh no, not *your* keeper. Mine !

BLANCHE.

Mine has left me too ; gone to my uncle for an idea.

PAUL.

Couldn't you give him one ?

BLANCHE.

I gave him twenty, but he was afraid of them all.

PAUL, smiling.

I fancy you've some terrible ideas ; eh, Miss Amber ?

BLANCHE.

Not so bad as some of yours, Mr. Paul !

PAUL.

Oh, you exaggerate mine !

BLANCHE.

Scarcely, when you've confessed to so many !

PAUL, embarrassed.

Yes, I've made a clean breast !

BLANCHE.

Don't dissimulate, then : keep it up !

PAUL, vague.

Keep it up ?

BLANCHE.

Your honourable frankness. Your desperate candour.

PAUL.

It does win me your sympathy ?

BLANCHE.

As nothing else could !

PAUL, after an instant, resolute.

Then I *will* keep it up.

BLANCHE.

There's plenty of it, whenever you require it.

PAUL.

I should like to take it all, and keep it for ever !

BLANCHE, smiling.

Take it in instalments—a dose every day.

PAUL.

Then such a person as me isn't repulsive to you ?

BLANCHE.

Repulsive—in your lonely grandeur ?

PAUL.

Oh, Miss Amber, I'm lonely, but I'm not particularly grand ! I'm a kind of moral leper, with a warning cow-bell round my neck. It's the solitude of misfortune.

BLANCHE.

It's better than the rush and crush of vulgar happiness. Do you know what you remind me of ?

PAUL.

Of any victim of fatality, I suppose—any freak of nature or melancholy monster : the pig-faced lady or the pie-bald man !

BLANCHE.

You remind me of some great wide-winged, wounded bird !

PAUL.

Do you feel like the sportsman who has brought him down ? Do you want to keep me as a trophy ?

BLANCHE.

Stuffed—in a glass case? No, I want you living; I want you fluttering; I want you perched on your rock, at least, if you *must* be tied to it!

PAUL.

Dear Miss Amber, I'll perch anywhere, if you'll perch near me! I hope you've come here to stay.

BLANCHE.

I'll stay as long as you hold out. But I said to you a while ago that I would tell you what to do in case at last you can't.

PAUL.

I can scarcely hold out now.

BLANCHE.

Then give in!

PAUL, agitated.

Give in?

BLANCHE.

If you *must* slip up—

PAUL, as she hesitates.

If I must?

BLANCHE.

Do it immensely! (Then as for the first time she becomes conscious of the book in his hand.) But it seems to me you *have* slipped up!

PAUL, who has put the book quickly behind him.

Immensely !

BLANCHE.

Zola ?

PAUL, producing the book.

Zola !

BLANCHE, compassionate

Your Mentor failed you—and you fell ?

PAUL.

To where you find me !

BLANCHE.

In an hour ?

PAUL.

In a minute !

BLANCHE, who has taken the book from him an instant, giving it back.

Even to that ?

PAUL, flinging it down.

Even to that !

BLANCHE, looking round her and seeing the flask, which she takes up.

And to this ?

PAUL.

To that too.

BLANCHE, with the pack of cards.

And to this ?

PAUL.

Also to that !

BLANCHE, with a cigar.

And to this ?

PAUL.

To everything !

BLANCHE, with exultation.

There's something magnificent in it !

PAUL, seeing Mrs. DOUBLEDAY, who has appeared at the entrance from the hall.

If you could only make Mamma think so !

Re-enter Mrs. DOUBLEDAY with several sealed and directed letters.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, sniffing the air as she comes down.

Tobacco ? (To BLANCHE, as she tosses down her cigar.) Are you smoking with him ?

BLANCHE, deciding and indicating the flask after an instant during which Mrs. DOUBLEDAY peremptorily rings the bell.

Yes—and drinking ! (Then indicating each of the other objects.)
And gambling ! And reading a dreadful book.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, seeing the name as BLANCHE waves the book.

Zola ?

BLANCHE.

Zola !

PAUL.

Dear mamma—it's Miss Amber's German humour.
She has but this moment come into the room !

BLANCHE.

To take the place of Captain Chanter.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, looking from one of them to the other.

Where *is* Captain Chanter?

PAUL, privately to BLANCHE.

Don't tell her!

BLANCHE.

Then *you* tell her!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, to PAUL; formidable.

Does he neglect you?

PAUL, alert.

Dear no, I shouldn't call it neglect!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Then why isn't he here?

Re-enter CUBIT from the hall.

CUBIT.

Did you ring, ma'am?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Stamp these letters.

PAUL, privately to BLANCHE, while Cubit takes the letters from Mrs.

DOUBLEDAY.

She'll repudiate him!

BLANCHE.

It will serve him right.

PAUL.

It will serve *me* wrong! (To himself.) I'll save him!
(Then as Mrs. DOUBLEDAY turns to him again for an answer while CUBIT stamps letters at one of the tables.) I turned the Captain out!

BLANCHE, to herself.

You darling!

PAUL.

I got so bad—he fled in horror!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

He couldn't stand you?

PAUL.

He couldn't stand me!

Re-enter Mr. BONSOR by the lower door on the right, while BLANCHE goes up in agitation.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, dismayed, to Mr. BONSOR.

He couldn't stand him!

MR. BONSOR, dismayed.

The Captain?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

He fled in horror!

PAUL, ecstatic.

And I've had at last an hour of freedom!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, showing Mr. BONSOR all the dreadful signs.

An hour of freedom !

BLANCHE, coming round and down on the right to PAUL.

You're simply sublime ! (She goes up again.)

PAUL, to himself.

I'm saving him !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, to CUBIT.

Have you seen Captain Chanter ?

CUBIT, with his letters stamped.

I think he left the house, ma'am.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, excited.

Then pursue him. (Imperious, as CUBIT stands.) Look for him !

CUBIT, at a loss.

Where, ma'am, shall I look ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, frantic, hurrying up.

I'll look !

Exit Mrs. DOUBLEDAY to the hall.

MR. BONSOR, to CUBIT, who is going.

Whose letters are those ?

CUBIT.

Mrs. Doubleday's, sir.

MR. BONSOR, austere.

Don't post them. They are to announce a marriage which will probably not take place.

PAUL, at the left, privately, with decision, to BLANCHE, who has come down again on his left.

It *shall* take place ! (He surreptitiously catches her right hand with his left and gives it a shake which she surreptitiously returns—a movement perceived by Mr. BONSOR.)

MR. BONSOR, going up.

Blanche !

She quickly joins him, and, after a few words, when they have gone up, he appears to dismiss her disapprovingly. Exit BLANCHE to the hall.

PAUL, while this takes place.

Cubit ! (Then, as CUBIT, with the letters, comes to him.) Post them !

CUBIT.

But Mr. Bonsor—

PAUL.

Hang Mr. Bonsor !

CUBIT, astounded ; then, with a gesture, smiling and taking another line.
What'll you give me ?

PAUL.

For hanging Mr. Bonsor ? (Taking from his waistcoat-pocket the money CHANTER has given him.) This !

CUBIT, with the money.

Five shillings ? (Delighted.) I'll post them !

Exit CUBIT to the hall.

MR. BONSOR, stern, coming down to PAUL.

Are you intoxicated?

PAUL, with an exhilaration, a familiarity, wholly new to Mr. BONSOR.

Dear Mr. Bonsor, I never was so lucid in all the whole course of my existence!

MR. BONSOR, struck, and with his suspicions confirmed by PAUL's manner and tone, seeing PITT BRUNT: re-enter PITT BRUNT by lower door on the right.

He's simply dead drunk!

PITT BRUNT

I'm perfectly aware! I rejoin Miss Amber.

MR. BONSOR, indicating the hall.

She's in the morning-room.

PITT BRUNT.

Shall I apprise her?

MR. BONSOR, complacent.

She's perfectly aware.

Exit PITT BRUNT to the hall. Re-enter Captain CHANTER from the lawn.

MR. BONSOR, eager, to CHANTER.

Do you know he's dead drunk?

CHANTER, coming down with his hat on—a little on the back of his head.
Intimately!

MR. BONSOR.

You couldn't stand him ?

PAUL, at whom CHANTER has looked ; privately.

I told them you couldn't !

CHANTER, with assurance

I couldn't stand him !

MR. BONSOR, heroical.

Well, *I* can !

CHANTER.

But I've pulled myself together again. I can now.

MR. BONSOR.

It's a very dreadful sight.

CHANTER.

To the pure all things are pure !

MR. BONSOR.

Then they're pure to *me* ! I'll take him myself.

CHANTER, uneasy, protesting.

Ah no—I've my rules to enforce !

MR. BONSOR.

You told me I must rest. *You* must.

CHANTER.

I *have* rested !

MR. BONSOR, looking at PAUL a moment, then reconsidering, deciding.

I'll take him when he has slept it off!

Exit Mr. BONSOR to the hall.

CHANTER, eager, hopeful, to PAUL.

Are you dead drunk?

PAUL.

Yes—with the sense of freedom!

CHANTER.

That'll do—if you'll save me!

PAUL.

I *am* saving you!

CHANTER.

Now's your time, then—she's coming back!

PAUL, visibly disconcerted.

Nina?

CHANTER.

I saw her on the bridge—she followed me. (Seeing Mrs. FRESHVILLE at the window.) Here she is!

Exit CHANTER rapidly to the library. Re-enter Mrs. FRESHVILLE from the garden.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Was that the Captain who left you?

PAUL.

Yes—do you want him?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, with resolution.

No! (After an instant.) That's what I've come back to tell you!

PAUL, civil, but vague.

Very good of you to come back!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, with sudden intensity.

Dudley—my feelings dragged me! I don't want any one in the world if I can only get *you*!

PAUL, confused.

Me, Nina?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

My earliest friend—my most generous—and my best!

PAUL, embarrassed.

My dear Nina, do I understand that you desire to make me your husband?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

That's the description of you that I confess I should find it most convenient to be able to give.

PAUL.

But isn't your proposal rather rashly precipitate?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Precipitate—when for years I've loved you in silence? That silence, when I see you, I naturally break!

PAUL.

But I thought the object of your affection was our whimsical friend the Captain.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

So did I, till I perceived that I was fundamentally mistaken. The Captain, though whimsical, is attractive ; but he has no heart. You *have* a heart, Dudley.

PAUL.

Ah, but it doesn't make me attractive ! Nothing *can* !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Your situation can—your situation *does*. You suffer.

PAUL.

Oh, I can bear it !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I can't then—when you're a captive !

PAUL.

Captivity has changed me—I'm not what I was !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Never mind what you were—you'll do very well. You're still young—you're still charming—you're still free.

PAUL.

Free ? Why, you recognise yourself that I'm bound !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, suspicious, seizing his arm.

"Bound"—to whom?

PAUL, after an instant.

No one—in the way you mean!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Then come to Paris!

PAUL, moved.

To Paris?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

To the Alcazar!

PAUL, struck, thinking.

The Eldorado?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

The Valentino!

PAUL.

The Solferino? (After a moment.) Too late!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, resentful.

Too late? It isn't too late for me to chive your photograph about!

PAUL, vague.

My photograph?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, indicating her reticule.

In this thing—wherever I go! (Abrupt.) Dudley, *who* stole it?

PAUL, blank.

I haven't the least idea !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Then *I* have !

PAUL.

Who in the world ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, reconsidering.

I'll tell you when we're married !

PAUL.

Dear Nina, marriage is a serious step—a step to think well over.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

We'll think it well over—together !

PAUL.

Give me more time, Nina !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

How much more do you want ?

PAUL, after an instant.

Why, say till to-morrow.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Then to-morrow I'll rush to you.

PAUL.

Thank you—I'll rush to *you*.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

At the inn? Will they let you?

PAUL, after reflection, with extreme resolution.

I won't ask them!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, irrepressible, triumphant.

Ah, I've got you!

PAUL, struck, wondering.

Have you, Nina?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, with a laugh.

Don't look at me as if I had said I'd got the measles!
Look at me as if you really remembered—

PAUL, as she hesitates.

Remembered, Nina?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

That I'm a dear good soul.

PAUL.

You *are*, Nina.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

And that I give you a radical change.

PAUL.

You do, Nina. By-bye.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

By-bye. (She goes up and then comes down again, while he stands lost in thought.) Just look here, Dud. (Then after an instant.) Why arrangements?

PAUL, vague.

Arrangements?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

What you call preliminaries. Fly with me without 'em! The preliminaries can follow.

PAUL, vague.

Do you allude to our luggage?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, laughing.

You *are* a daisy! Let me pluck you now!

PAUL, rueful, unready.

This moment?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You shrink—you desire some regular form?

PAUL.

I've been taught in all these years that some regular form is proper.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Then we'll have one—for *you*! And we'll see about it to-morrow. (At the window, smiling, bantering.) Propriety!

Exit Mrs. FRESHVILLE to the lawn.

PAUL, as he sees CHANTER.

Poor old Nina !

Re-enter Captain CHANTER from the library.

CHANTER, who has looked in first cautiously and speaks in a loud,
eager whisper.

Well ?

PAUL.

She wants me to go to Paris !

CHANTER.

Then why the deuce *don't* you ?

PAUL.

Because I don't want to !

CHANTER, blank, vexed.

Don't "want" to ?

PAUL, excited.

Not the least bit in the world !

CHANTER.

Then you *ought* to want to !

PAUL.

Isn't that just my difficulty—that I don't do what I ought ?

CHANTER.

I'm here to make you. You're free !

PAUL, passing his hand over his head.

That's just where it is!—I'm free! She wants me to fly with her.

CHANTER.

Don't stand pottering, then. Fly!

PAUL.

I *can't* fly!

CHANTER, trying to push him off.

You must!

PAUL, disengaging himself with a flare of passion, and coming round and down.

I won't!

CHANTER.

What the devil's the matter with you?

PAUL.

I don't know, Captain! I ain't so bad—I ain't tempted!

CHANTER, indignant.

You *are* tempted!

PAUL.

Then I resist!

CHANTER, furious.

Wretch!

Re-enter CUBIT from the hall.

CUBIT, to CHANTER.

Mrs. Doubleday's quite wild, sir.

CHANTER.

I go to her. (To PAUL, privately, with concentrated urgency, as he goes up.) Nina's a revelation! Try her!

Exit Captain CHANTER to the hall.

CUBIT, to PAUL.

Letters gone, sir!

PAUL, with rising spirit.

Well, I ain't, old man, *am* I?

CUBIT, surprised, gratified.

No indeed, sir; you seem quite on the spot!

Exit CUBIT to the hall.

PAUL, alone, echoing, with the sense of his victory growing stronger, overwhelming him at last.

"Nina's a revelation"? There are other revelations than Nina! "Try her"? I don't *want* to try her! I don't want to try anybody! (Looking about him.) I don't want to do anything! (Drops into the chair on the right of the table.) What *is* the matter with me? I *am* free and I ain't bad! Upon my honour (rising slowly with the force of the revelation and the surprise) I believe that, after all—it's awfully queer (pauses a moment, then drops back into the chair)—upon my honour, I'm *good*!

ACT THIRD

MR BONSOR's drawing-room. BLANCHE AMBER comes in from the hall, meeting PITT BRUNT, dressed in the same manner as at the beginning of Act First, who comes in from the garden.

PITT BRUNT.

Dear Miss Amber, I'm delighted to put in a few minutes with you—my solitude, since luncheon, has been positively uncanny.

BLANCHE.

Haven't you had my uncle to comfort you?

PITT BRUNT.

There's no comfort in your uncle, now that Mr. Doubleday has disappeared!

BLANCHE.

Isn't there any in Mrs. Doubleday—exhilarated by the triumph of her charms?

PITT BRUNT.

She buries her charms at the railway-station—waiting for the fugitive to alight!

BLANCHE, disappointed.

You don't mean to say he returns so soon !

PITT BRUNT.

I don't know, dear Miss Amber, what you call "soon."
(Looking at his watch.) A debauch of twenty hours !

BLANCHE.

Why, he went for at least sixty !

PITT BRUNT, surprised.

Did he communicate to you his programme ?

BLANCHE.

It was impossible — yesterday afternoon — to remain ignorant of his condition.

PITT BRUNT.

Indeed it was !

BLANCHE.

When he was missed—I understood. I know that when such natures fall—

PITT BRUNT.

They fall to the very bottom ? I've no doubt whatever that he's as far down as you can go. Fortunately Captain Chanter has been let down after him.

BLANCHE.

By a rope round the waist—to pull him out ? I perfectly know for what purpose he followed Mr. Paul to London.

PITT BRUNT.

The engagement he had conscientiously taken left him no alternative, and he surmounted the repugnance he naturally felt. When he brings the culprit back we shall clear up the mystery of where the money came from—the money for Doubleday's fare.

BLANCHE.

By the train to town? It was only two shillings.

PITT BRUNT.

He had no such amount in his possession. We are reluctantly driven to the belief that he stole the two shillings.

BLANCHE, indignant.

Your belief's a false belief! He didn't!

PITT BRUNT.

To say nothing of the money for the other excesses that were his objective. You admitted just now that such natures sink to the bottom. Well, the bottom is theft!

BLANCHE.

Then he stopped half-way. He borrowed the money.

PITT BRUNT.

From whom, pray—since the very servants have been examined? (Then as she remains silent.) Will you accompany me on the river? I put in an hour each day, and my hour has come round.

BLANCHE.

Your hour may have come round, Mr. Brunt, but your humble servant hasn't. You don't take the right way to make her!

PITT BRUNT.

I'll take it in the boat. (Confident, engaging.) You see if I don't!

BLANCHE, impatient.

Ah, your boat's not *my* boat, and it's impossible for me to embark with you!

PITT BRUNT, more pressing.

I want you to embark, you know, on the river of life; to float with me down the crystal stream—

BLANCHE.

That flows into the Smutt at Blackport? I don't find that a tempting voyage!

PITT BRUNT, as Mr. BONSOR appears.

Only give me a chance to point you out the beauties!

Enter Mr. BONSOR from the hall.

MR. BONSOR, encouraging.

Ah, you're pointing out to Miss Amber the beauties?

PITT BRUNT.

Even as you have pointed them out to *me*!

BLANCHE, at the door of the library ; with a curtsey.

I must leave you to discuss them together !

Exit BLANCHE AMBER.

PITT BRUNT.

She won't come out with me in the boat.

MR. BONSOR.

The best place to command her attention, as I instructed you.

PITT BRUNT.

I seek in vain, Mr. Bonsor, to command her attention or to carry out your instructions.

MR. BONSOR.

They seem indeed, in the light of the present crisis, to have been singularly futile ! (Then seeing CUBIT with a telegram.)
I tremble at every telegram !

Enter CUBIT from the hall.

CUBIT, as Mr. BONSOR takes the telegram from his tray.

The ninth, sir !

MR. BONSOR, opening the telegram.

The Captain reports to us from hour to hour his alternations of confidence and despair.

PITT BRUNT.

I hope this time it's confidence.

MR. BONSOR, who has read.

Despair !

CUBIT, as Mrs. DOUBLEDAY appears ; announcing.

Mrs. Doubleday ! (Enter Mrs. DOUBLEDAY, in her bonnet, from the garden.) Despair, ma'am !

Exit CUBIT to the hall.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, agitated.

Despair ?

MR. BONSOR, reading.

“ Last hope dashed—evidently sunk to bottom.”

PITT BRUNT.

Sunk to bottom ! That's what Miss Amber says.

MR. BONSOR, struck.

She admits it—she expresses it ? Then follow that up !

PITT BRUNT.

In the library ?

MR. BONSOR.

In the boat.

PITT BRUNT.

But if she won't enter the boat ?

MR. BONSOR, after an instant.

I'll see her on board.

PITT BRUNT, at the door of the library.

I'll detain her till you're free.

Exit PITT BRUNT.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Do you propose to carry her on board ?

MR. BONSOR.

It may come to that!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, injured.

You might take a little less interest in Miss Amber's marriage—!

MR. BONSOR.

And a little more interest in yours? I consider that you should make a condition.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, vague.

For the retention of my hand?

MR. BONSOR.

The success of the Captain's pursuit. He must bring Paul back.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

But if Paul has sunk lower than any sounding?

MR. BONSOR.

The Captain requires the equipment of a diver!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, decided.

We'll have no more diving: he must come back without him! Paul will have dropped to his natural level.

MR. BONSOR.

You allude to the supposed companion of his orgy? That she *is* his companion is after all but an hypothesis.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

An hypothesis for which the evidence is crushing. It was the ground for the Captain's action—an action admirably prompt.

MR. BONSOR.

Oh yes, when the horse was stolen !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

If the horse *is* stolen, there are consolations. For really, to receive Paul—

MR. BONSOR, as she falters.

From the arms of such a creature ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Would cost me more than I can say !

MR. BONSOR.

I would protect you by receiving him first—I would pump him dry.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I should feel as if he would never *be* dry !

MR. BONSOR.

We should have doubtless more than ever, in our intercourse with him, to make use of the moral mackintosh.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I impressed upon Captain Chanter from the first the necessity of such a garment.

MR. BONSOR.

However, since he has muffed his catch—

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, with asperity.

Why the dickens doesn't he come back? (Up at the long window.) I'll wire that question!

Exit Mrs. DOUBLEDAY.

MR. BONSOR, alone, surprised.

Not, I hope, in those words! (Then as he sees BLANCHE: re-enter BLANCHE AMBER from the library.) Mr. Brunt's gone without you?

BLANCHE.

No, dear uncle; he's in there.

MR. BONSOR.

And what's he doing?

BLANCHE.

When I left him he was making a speech.

MR. BONSOR, struck; at the door of the library.

On what subject?

BLANCHE.

Try to make out!

MR. BONSOR, as he listens, with his eyes on BLANCHE and an admonitory motion.

Hear, hear!

Exit rapidly Mr. BONSOR.

BLANCHE, joyous, as she sees PAUL.

Ah, what a blessed change !

Enter PAUL DOUBLEDAY from the hall ; with a complete transformation of appearance, expression, demeanour. He is bright, confident, assured, and dressed in the height of the fashion ; with flowers in his buttonhole, his moustache bravely curled, his high hat, of a striking shape, gallantly worn. He carries in his hand a magnificent bouquet, and is followed by CUBIT, who bears an armful of parcels.

PAUL, in high spirits.

Dispose them on the table, Cubit, and treat them with respect—they're the spoils of a great campaign !

CUBIT.

And what shall I give the cabman ?

PAUL.

Give him my blessing !

CUBIT.

I'm afraid he won't go for that, sir.

PAUL.

If he won't go he can stay !

CUBIT, scandalised.

At half-a-crown an hour ?

PAUL.

I stayed for less, Cubit—all those years.

CUBIT, deprecating.

Oh *you*, Mr. Paul— !

PAUL.

Well, I wasn't such a fool as we thought !

BLANCHE, who has produced her portemonnaie ; giving CUBIT a coin.

Dismiss the cab.

CUBIT, with the money.

And bring back the change ?

BLANCHE.

Keep the change.

CUBIT, to himself.

Seven-and-six !

Exit CUBIT to the hall.

PAUL, who has dashed at BLANCHE to kiss her hand.

Has my absence excited remark ?

BLANCHE.

It has been the only subject of our conversation.

PAUL.

Have you mentioned, in the course of that conversation, the motive of my little break ?

BLANCHE, smiling.

How can I have mentioned it when I haven't known it ?

PAUL, surprised.

Didn't I make it clear— ?

BLANCHE.

When I rejoined you in the garden—after your fall?

PAUL, oblivious.

My fall?

BLANCHE.

Why, to the old wild life.

PAUL, prompt, perfunctory.

Oh yes, the old wild life !

BLANCHE.

I don't strike a man when he's down.

PAUL.

Certainly, I forgot—I'm down ! (Offering his bouquet ; smiling.)
And I gathered on my way down this handful of flowers.

BLANCHE, with the bouquet.

Flowers as wild as yourself?—flowers of folly, flowers of passion? (Inhaling their odour.) They're sweet—but ought I to say so?

PAUL.

Why not?—I got them in Baker Street. (Then as BLANCHE looks disconcerted.) A jolly good shop—with an awfully pretty girl.

BLANCHE, more reassured ; after an instant.

Perhaps you had better not tell me about people of that sort. I don't wish to draw you out.

PAUL.

I see. (Then after an instant.) But perhaps you think I'm worse than I am !

BLANCHE.

Not worse than you were when you let everything go.

PAUL.

When—and where—did I let *anything* go ?

BLANCHE.

Why, yesterday afternoon, in the garden, as I say, when you finally told me you must get off by yourself.

PAUL.

For the first time for such an age ?

BLANCHE.

You declared you must go up to town.

PAUL.

Precisely, for a little change.

BLANCHE.

You disguised your necessity under a singular expression.

PAUL.

I said I must take a look round ?—Well, I took a look.

BLANCHE, prompt.

Oh, you needn't tell me what you've seen !

PAUL, bringing a parcel from the table.

I saw some *bonbons* in Bond Street—and brought you a box.

BLANCHE, with the box.

Was there a pretty girl in that shop too?

PAUL, laughing.

Oh yes, two or three! (Then showing a small parcel.) I got something else, you see—as a present to Mamma.

BLANCHE.

Well, you've certainly made the money fly!

PAUL.

All over the place! Why shouldn't I—hang it!—if I happen to feel flush?

BLANCHE, struck.

Isn't *that* the old wild tone?

PAUL.

I daresay it is, the devil take it!

BLANCHE, alert.

There it is again!

PAUL.

It seems as if it had come to stay, doesn't it?

BLANCHE.

We mustn't let it stay any longer than it positively must. Remember that I'm fighting on your side.

PAUL, laughing.

Dear Miss Amber, you're even more adorable, upon my word, than when you first took service under my flag!

BLANCHE.

You mustn't say such things to me till you've recovered.

PAUL.

That I've recovered is precisely what's the matter with me!

BLANCHE, vague.

Do you mean from the effects of yesterday?

PAUL.

I mean from the effects of these ten years. (Reckless.) My dear girl, confound it, you know, I'm all right!

BLANCHE, disappointed.

Already?

PAUL.

Surely it has taken long enough.

BLANCHE.

Not long enough for *me*. (After an instant.) I don't care for saints! There's one at me already.

PAUL.

The member for Blackport? (Prompt.) Oh, I'm not so good as *he*!

BLANCHE.

If you were you'd be too awful.

PAUL.

But I'm as good as—as good as—

BLANCHE, challenging, while he considers

As good as who?

PAUL.

Well, as good as most men!

BLANCHE, disgusted.

That's far *too* good!

PAUL, trying again.

Then I'm as good as Captain Chanter.

BLANCHE.

I don't believe it! Captain Chanter's far too good.
(Then after an instant.) If you're so tremendously virtuous,
and you happen to feel flush, please repay me—

PAUL.

The money you so kindly lent me? It was a return-
ticket. I could neither have started nor come back
without the pecuniary assistance you were so good as to
render my distress; but I'm sorry to say that distress
remains very much what it was.

BLANCHE.

Then how can you have felt flush?

PAUL.

By the purchase of hats and coats and trousers. Ready made—I told them to put them down.

BLANCHE, vague.

Down to *me*?

PAUL.

Down to Mamma. (Indicating the other objects.) Put down everything.

BLANCHE, exultant.

Then you're gloriously in debt! And your mother won't pay.

PAUL, decided.

She'll *have* to!

BLANCHE, decided.

She shan't!

PAUL, blank.

Then who will?

BLANCHE, after an instant.

What if *I* should?

PAUL, gazing at her with surprise and emotion, then bounding to her, seizing her hand, and raising it again to his lips.

Angel!

Re-enter Mrs. DOUBLEDAY from the garden.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, arrested, amazed.

Paul!

PAUL, with undisturbed self-possession and good-humour.

I was saluting Miss Amber in the joy of my return. Permit me, under the influence of the same emotion, to extend to *you*, dear Mamma (approaching her with open arms), an embrace more comprehensive.

Re-enter Mr. BONSOR from the library.

MR. BONSOR, arrested, amazed, while Mrs. DOUBLEDAY bewilderedly submits.

Mrs. Doubleday !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, confounded, but bridling and indicating BLANCHE.
I found him kissing *her* !

MR. BONSOR, aghast, as PITT BRUNT reappears.

Her ?

Re-enter PITT BRUNT from the library.

PITT BRUNT, echoing, indignant.

Her ?

BLANCHE, exalted, audacious, passing in front of PITT BRUNT on her way up left.

Her *what* ? Her finger-tips !

PAUL, to PITT BRUNT, laughing.

Aren't even the finger-tips more than ever *you've* got at ?—How d'ye do, Mr. Bonsor ? Noticed my little break ?—remarked my lucid interval ? (Then as the others exchange expressions of stupefaction.) Deplored it, then, bewailed it, felt it in the seat of sensibility ? Very charming of you all !

MR. BONSOR.

If you designate by those extraordinary terms your unaccountable absence, I have only to observe that, though it has been briefer than we apprehended, we've been amply occupied in considering the questions with which we should find ourselves confronted on its coming to an end.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

If it *should* come to an end !

PAUL, surprised, amused.

If it *should* ? Why, what did you think I was in for ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

We didn't permit ourselves to name it !

MR. BONSOR.

You mean not to each other.

PITT BRUNT.

Only to hint it to a third person.

BLANCHE, who has come down smiling, on the right.

And yet draw the line at a fourth !

MR. BONSOR.

That line, Blanche, is not yet effaced.

PAUL, to Mrs. DOUBLEDAY.

Did you miss the usual forms of separation ? You see I had to pop off. (Then as they are again visibly startled.) To

catch the 4.40—the particular train I wanted! I *required* those hours in town, don't you know?—there were things I had imperatively to do. But I put on a spurt—I managed to rush them through!

MR. BONSOR.

You speak as if they had been odious necessities!

PAUL.

There's no doubt, Mr. Bonsor, they were necessities, and distinctly urgent ones; but, urgent as they were, it would indeed be wide of the mark to call them in the least odious. In fact the whole thing was a treat!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Paul!

MR. BONSOR.

Blanche! Please leave the room. (To PITT BRUNT.) He has really reached a point—

PITT BRUNT.

That embarrasses even *me*. (Opening the lower door on the right for BLANCHE.) Your retreat.

PAUL, opening for her with a laugh the door of the library.

Spare my blushes!

BLANCHE, between the doors a moment, then at PAUL's, giving him a brush in the face with her bouquet.

Reprobate!

Exit BLANCHE AMBER to the library.

PAUL.

You see it was the first time for years, and there wasn't a single moment of it that hadn't its appreciable quality! (Then while Mrs. DOUBLEDAY and Mr. BONSOR indulge in manifestations of increasing dismay.) Whatever delights the future may hold for me, I feel I never shall forget the rapture of those hours. Everything, in such a case, conspires to intensify the bliss: it's the sort of thing that, as I may say, don't you know? one makes for ever one's own!

MR. BONSOR.

Mrs. Doubleday, shall I face it alone?

PITT BRUNT, springing to the lower door on the right, which he holds open for her.

While you step in here!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I think I shall suffer less if *you* step in there. (To Mr. BONSOR.) Tell him to leave us.

PITT BRUNT, disconcerted.

Then I'll mingle my innocence with Miss Amber's.

PAUL, checking him with a gesture as he crosses to the library.

My dear fellow, I wish to mingle mine!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

After this extraordinary exhibition of your having none?

PAUL, arrested, chagrined.

Ah yes—for *her*! (To PITT BRUNT.) What I mean is, don't you know? that I aspire to her myself.

PITT BRUNT, to Mr. BONSOR.

I believe he's still drunk!

PAUL, at the lower door on the right, which he holds open for PITT BRUNT.

In vino veritas—when I'm drunk I'm pressing!

PITT BRUNT, crossing at last to the door, where he stands again an instant with his eyes on PAUL.

Reprobate!

Exit PITT BRUNT.

PAUL.

And where, all this while, is the dear old Captain?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, with high significance.

That's what I should like particularly to know!

MR. BONSOR.

He has not returned from London.

PAUL, surprised.

What's he doing in London?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I wish you would find out!

MR. BONSOR.

He went up to track you.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

But he has given you up.

MR. BONSOR.

Prematurely, we can't but think.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

He reports that you've disappeared.

MR. BONSOR.

For ever—with a female.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

The same female.

PAUL.

The old female—Nina?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, alert.

Is she old, Dudley?

PAUL.

Dear me, yes—about your age. And she's here.

MR. BONSOR.

You brought her back?

PAUL.

I didn't take her!

MR. BONSOR.

And she didn't take *you*?

PAUL, with a gesture of repudiation ; almost wounded.
How *could* she ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, with deepening uneasiness.
Then what's she here for ?

PAUL, bethinking himself.
Perhaps after all she has gone.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.
Perhaps after all she hasn't ! You'll be so good as to find out.

MR. BONSOR, astonished.
You wish to throw them together ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.
I wish to keep them apart !

PAUL, vague.
Of whom, Mamma, do you speak ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.
I speak of Captain Chanter !

PAUL, after an instant ; diplomatic.
There's plenty of time.—He reports that I've vanished ?

MR. BONSOR.
He wires that you're practically extinct.

PAUL.

Does he take me for a species—or for a volcano? In the latter case I'm in lively eruption!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, suspicious.

Why hasn't he mentioned the position of the second crater?

PAUL.

The lady to whom we just alluded?—The second crater's temporarily quiet. (At the table on which he caused his parcels to be deposited.) Such a pity the Captain's away—I've brought him a charming present: a couple of French novels—the last things out.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

And pray where have you picked up such insidious productions?

PAUL.

In Leicester Square—such a funny little shop.

MR. BONSOR.

The contents of which you also appropriated—

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, as he hesitates.

When the proprietor didn't happen to be looking!

PAUL, staring; then laughing.

You mean I bagged them? (With two other mementoes from the table.) Yes, and I priggd something for each of *you*!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, with her present, opening a small case.
A massive bracelet ?

MR. BONSOR, doing the same.
And an expensive pin ?

PAUL.
So glad you like them ! I had them booked.

MR. BONSOR.
And how will you pay for them ?

PAUL.
Why, as one always pays—out of income.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, triumphant.
You haven't *got* any income !

PAUL.
I shall have a very good one when we settle.

MR. BONSOR.
That will be ten years hence. We don't settle till you're forty.

PAUL.
My dear Mr. Bonsor, I *am* forty.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.
Since when ? You were thirty last week.

PAUL.

So I was. But I've grown.

MR. BONSOR.

Ten years—in a week?

PAUL.

Ten years in an hour! I'm of age.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, aghast

To cease to be looked after?

PAUL.

To begin to look after *you*. I *am* beginning—I *have* begun. So you'll pay me up.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

The wages of sin?

PAUL.

I really think the only sin is the sin of impertinence! Don't you so much as thank me for the reward of yours?

MR. BONSOR.

Your mother will hardly go through such a form for an ornament she is incapable of retaining. She will take it back—

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, who has slipped the bracelet over her arm, where she has complacently regarded it; after a little renunciatory wriggle at the clasp.

As soon as I succeed in removing it. And Mr. Bonsor will only keep his pin—

PAUL.

To stick into *me* when he's vicious? I warn him that I've ceased to be a pin-cushion! (With an illustrated "society-paper," which he hands, open, to Mr. BONSOR.) There's something—just out!—for the member for Blackport.

MR. BONSOR, with the coloured cartoon.

"The Idol of the North"—!

PAUL.

Putting in an hour!

MR. BONSOR.

I'll pass it on to Blanche.

PAUL.

Don't do that: it's too awfully like! (Taking from his pocket a small paper.) That's the figure of what I've spent.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, with the paper, in dismay, to Mr. BONSOR.

Seventy pounds!

PAUL.

Nine and sevenpence. I'll trouble you for a cheque.

MR. BONSOR, with the paper, after an instant, to Mrs. DOUBLEDAY.

Will you write one?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, indignant, at the window.

Never!

Exit Mrs. DOUBLEDAY to the garden.

PAUL.

Will you?

MR. BONSOR, at the lower door on the right.

Never!

Exit MR. BONSOR. Enter Captain CHANTER from the hall.

PAUL.

Hang it then, will *you*?

CHANTER, aghast.

You're not off with her, as I instructed you?

PAUL.

I'm no more off than she is. I'm to call on her.

CHANTER, frantic.

Then by all that's desperate, call!

PAUL.

There's no hurry, my dear fellow. Nina won't go!

CHANTER.

She'll go if *you'll* go. You told me so yourself!

PAUL.

Yes, but I won't—that's what I've an appointment to make her understand. (Then on a wild motion of despair of CHANTER'S.) If you thought we *had* bolted, why did you give chase?

CHANTER.

To speed you on your way—to smother your remorse. You promised to save me, and I've been living in the blind confidence that I *was* saved!

PAUL.

You shall be if you keep your head—if you'll do exactly what I tell you. In the first place, you must assist me with Miss Amber. You must not let her find out that I ain't what I thought.

CHANTER.

Nor what I thought, either! I thought I could trust you!

PAUL.

You thought I had every vice. So did I, till I was put to the test. You put me to it yourself—you proved me utterly wanting. But it's the fond belief that I'm a splendid Satan that's the singular source of her interest.

CHANTER.

That interest is quenched, then, from the moment you moon about here. The way to impress her is obviously to do something Satanic.

PAUL.

A good way to begin, then, will be to keep a devil of an eye on *you*. You're indispensable to my plan.

CHANTER.

I operate as a diversion to Mrs. Doubleday!

PAUL.

If you'll direct her activity into a different channel—

CHANTER.

You'll also find a different one for Nina's? What channel *is* there—

PAUL.

But the one from Dover to Calais? I'll *find* one, if I have to dig it! Leave me to do so.

CHANTER, uneasy.

With Nina all over the place?

PAUL.

I'm all over the place! Do as I tell you. (Then as CHANTER still stands reluctant; authoritative.) Go to your room! (Exit Captain CHANTER with quick docility to the hall. Re-enter Mr. BONSOR by the lower door on the right.) Have you come to tell me you *will* write the cheque?

MR. BONSOR.

For half the amount—on a condition. That of your withdrawing your opposition—

PAUL.

To the Idol of the North as an active rival? (Thinking, amused.) For thirty-five pounds?

MR. BONSOR.

Four and ninepence ha'penny. Permit him regular access—

PAUL.

To the young lady he bores? Not for the money!

MR. BONSOR, disappointed.

Then on what terms can we arrange it?

PAUL, up at the door to the hall as BLANCHE re-appears.

Ask the young lady herself!

Exit PAUL DOUBLEDAY. Re-enter BLANCHE AMBER from the library.

BLANCHE, with her bouquet.

I must delay no longer to put my flowers into water.

MR. BONSOR.

I beg you to come back then as soon as you've supplied them with a sustenance of which I decline to regard them as deserving. The member for Blackport—

BLANCHE.

What on earth does he want now?

MR. BONSOR.

What you've never yet frankly given him—the chance to catch your eye.

BLANCHE.

Dear uncle, I'm not the Speaker!

MR. BONSOR.

He'll make you feel like the House itself. And when the House divides—

BLANCHE, laughing.

I shall be in the right lobby! (Then as she sees PITT BRUNT : re-enter PITT BRUNT by the lower door on the right.) I'll be back!

Exit BLANCHE AMBER by the lower door on the right.

PITT BRUNT, *anxious.*

And where'll *he* be?

MR. BONSOR.

It will be impossible henceforth to calculate with any exactness. Hitherto we've done it to a second.

PITT BRUNT, *aggrieved.*

You should really have taken him in hand!

MR. BONSOR.

The way to begin was by taking that woman.

PITT BRUNT, *after a moment.*

That may possibly be the way to end!

MR. BONSOR, *struck.*

It *might* be—all the more that she's somewhere about.
(*After an instant.*) I suppose her attractions are pronounced.

PITT BRUNT, *prompt.*

Very easily, with a little practice!

MR. BONSOR, *surprised.*

Then you've seen her?

PITT BRUNT, *on his guard.*

Not to know it was she! But if she's somewhere about, her confederate must also be.

MR. BONSOR, at the lower door on the right.

Thank heaven, he can't be in two places at once !

Exit Mr. BONSOR.

PITT BRUNT, alone.

My only comfort ! (Then thinking, bewildered.) Yet he behaves as if he wanted them both !

Re-enter CUBIT from the hall.

CUBIT, announcing.

Mrs. Freshville !

Enter Mrs. FRESHVILLE. Exit CUBIT.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You here still ? How d'ye do to-day ?

PITT BRUNT.

I never feel quite fit when I haven't put in my hour.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I've come to put in mine—I'm tired of messing about.

PITT BRUNT.

I heard just now you *were* messing—

MRS. FRESHVILLE, amazed.

The man has the cheek to mention it ?

PITT BRUNT.

Oh no, he doesn't mention it—but the whole thing's known.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, alert.

Then how does the woman take it?

PITT BRUNT, deprecating.

She's scarcely a woman—!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, impatient.

I know—she's a monster! What does she make of it?

PITT BRUNT.

You're severe! But she doesn't make quite so much of it as you might expect. She takes it rather easy. In fact you might suppose she almost likes it!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, astounded.

Likes his goings on with *me*?

PITT BRUNT.

Then they've been as bad as we all suppose?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

They've been beyond everything that ever was! (With renewed stupefaction.) She likes his being engaged to another woman?

PITT BRUNT, surprised.

Do you mean to say he's literally engaged?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

As much as a man ever was in the world. Engaged up to his eyes—engaged down to his boots!

PITT BRUNT.

Happily I don't think she knows that !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Then I shall have the pleasure of telling her !

PITT BRUNT.

I daresay it will produce some effect. She doesn't mind anything *except* that.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Except marriage—or the next thing to it? And she calls herself a respectable woman?

PITT BRUNT, wincing ; after an instant.

I'm bound to say she's very hard to shock.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Put it stronger. She's a monster of what-do-you-call-it !

PITT BRUNT, at a loss.

Do you call it paradox?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I call it immorality ! But wasn't I jolly right to come !

PITT BRUNT.

Do you argue that he'll see you?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Not if he can help it ! But I argue that I'm perfectly visible. Where do you suppose he is?

PITT BRUNT, looking at his watch ; melancholy.

I'm afraid he's somewhere with *her*.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Don't take it harder than *I* do ! (After an instant.) Could you bring us together ?

PITT BRUNT, vague.

You and him ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Me and her.

PITT BRUNT, disconcerted.

Dear no—not *that* !

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Well, you needn't scratch my eyes out ! (Holding up several of CHANTER'S letters.) It will do quite as well to hand her these. His letters—nine of 'em—breathing every vow.

PITT BRUNT, with the letters ; alert.

Vows of passion—vows of marriage ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Vows of everything on earth—and every vow a lie. Poke 'em in her face.

PITT BRUNT, intensely eager.

I'll poke 'em ! But how can I ever thank you ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Thank me for nothing ! I didn't do it for *you* ! (Then as CUBIT reappears : re-enter CUBIT from the hall.) That way ?

PITT BRUNT, surprised.

You're going off ?

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

I'm going on. (Up at the door to the hall.) Work her up !

Exit Mrs. FRESHVILLE and CUBIT to the hall.

PITT BRUNT, as BLANCHE reappears.

I'll work her up !

Re-enter BLANCHE AMBER by the lower door on the right.

BLANCHE.

My uncle has just told me you wish to catch my eye.

PITT BRUNT.

In order to direct it, Miss Amber, to unprecedented documents.

BLANCHE, smiling.

Parliamentary papers ?

PITT BRUNT.

Not exactly Blue Books ! (Giving her Mrs. FRESHVILLE's letters.) I place them in your hands.

BLANCHE, with the letters, vague.

You mean I'm to look them through ? But they're letters—they're private. (Then after hastily glancing at a word here and there.) They're all about love !

PITT BRUNT.

They're all about marriage—you'll easily see !

BLANCHE.

I don't *want* to see.—especially if they're yours ?

PITT BRUNT.

How can you think they're mine when you know my hand ?

BLANCHE, with a look at the letters again.

Yes—it's a better hand than yours ! (Then suddenly tossing them down.) But I never read such stuff !

PITT BRUNT.

They may well bring the blush to your cheek, but I regret to be obliged to deepen it !—You haven't seen that writing ?

BLANCHE, with a letter that is out of its envelope, trying ineffectually to remember, then suddenly catching sight of something.

Oh yes, I recall a name !

PITT BRUNT, exultant.

May I inquire *what* name ?

BLANCHE.

The name that was on his photograph.

PITT BRUNT, struck.

He has given you his photograph ?

BLANCHE.

Oh yes. That is he hasn't!

PITT BRUNT.

But you recognise the writer?

BLANCHE, troubled, uncertain.

Mr. Paul?

PITT BRUNT, triumphant.

Mr. Paul!

BLANCHE, with emotion, thinking.

"Dudley"!

PITT BRUNT, vague.

Dudley?

BLANCHE, after another glance at the open letters.

It's the pet name. "To his Nina"!

PITT BRUNT, at the door of the library; impressive.

Say, Madam, to his miserable victim!

Exit PITT BRUNT.

BLANCHE, alone, agitated.

He *makes* victims—and makes them miserable? (Hastily gathering the letters together.) Who should know it better than I?—But what has Mr. Brunt to do with these things—how did he ever get them? He gave them to me as a warning? (After an instant.) Miserable as I am, I reject the warning! I'll give them back to the writer! (Then as she sees PAUL and instinctively puts the letters behind her.) Oh, Mr. Paul, you're just the man—!

Re-enter PAUL DOUBLEDAY from the hall, in an elaborate change of costume.

PAUL, anxious, flurried.

You're just the woman, Miss Amber, but I'm trying to track the Captain. I've something special to say to him.

Re-enter Captain CHANTER from the hall.

CHANTER, to PAUL.

I've just seen Cubit—he tells me you want me.

BLANCHE, at the lower door on the right, to PAUL, smiling.

Then you don't want *me*!

Exit BLANCHE AMBER with the letters.

PAUL, breathless.

Mamma knows all—she has your letters!

CHANTER, appalled.

Nina has been here?

PAUL.

She *is* here—in my retreat.

CHANTER, astonished.

You've *got* one?

PAUL.

The Chinese room—I've taken it. She arrived—fearfully out of patience—as I was on the very point of going to her, and I thought it best to have her right in. But she had already passed in the letters. She proclaims her vengeance on you as successfully accomplished, and

I left her there gloating over it to come and warn you. The fat's on the fire—but I told her I can't oblige her.

CHANTER, rueful, resentful.

You can't oblige anybody! So what the mischief is she waiting for?

PAUL.

For her photograph—I mean for mine. You broke your promise to carry it to her, and she declines to leave the house without it.

CHANTER.

How could I carry it to her when I couldn't find it?

PAUL, looking blankly about.

I'm in exactly the same predicament!

CHANTER, helpless, hopeless.

So she's here for the rest of our lives?

PAUL, as Mrs. DOUBLEDAY reappears.

I'm terribly afraid not!

Re-enter Mrs. DOUBLEDAY from the garden. Instantly astonished by the presence of CHANTER, she hurries down toward him; then, between the two men, stopping short, looks with sudden wonderment and suspicion from one of them to the other.

CHANTER, embarrassed, confused, but trying to meet her.

Dearest friend!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, retaining, with resentment and severity, possession of the hand he tries to kiss.

Your dearest friend has come to *get* you! (Then as CHANTER

exchanges with PAUL a look of confirmed dismay.) You grossly desert your dearest friend !

CHANTER, collapsing, pleading.

I know that my conduct has been dreadful— !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I must clear it up with you. (Indicating the garden.) I've been perched there on the lookout.

PAUL.

His arrival happened to escape your notice—it has just taken place.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Long enough ago for me to remark that his first impulse has not been the impulse to fly to me.

PAUL.

He was in the very act of spreading his wings !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

It has come home to me since your own return that he spread them very wide in town. (Then to CHANTER, while he exchanges with PAUL another woeful regard.) You see the condition in which your pupil has reappeared? Your responsibilities sit very light !

PAUL.

He has just been explaining to me that he has every intention to meet them.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

They have increased tremendously this morning, and he shall presently hear from me on the subject. In the meantime he'll go to my room and ask my maid for a precious packet, conspicuous on the mantel-piece, sealed with large red seals and containing papers of grave importance. (To CHANTER, who stands bewildered while PAUL goes up in agitation.) You'll take them straight to my boudoir, and we'll go through them together. (With high resolution.) We'll have it right over!

CHANTER, lingering, paralysed.

I see what you mean!

PAUL, coming down again, with irrepressible authority.

Then march!

Exit CHANTER, startled, with a rush of desperation, to the hall.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, who has massively seated herself.

What did you remark to him?

PAUL, familiar, gay.

I remarked, my dear lady, that there's no resisting you; and there evidently isn't, unless a fellow's like *me*. But, you know, I'm adamant, whereas the Captain's all fiddle-strings and moonbeams. (Then as she stares, astounded at his new tone.) There's one thing, however, you know—you mustn't, as I may say, *presume*, you mustn't stake everything, on the force—or, as you would perhaps yourself prefer to call it, the charm—of your certainly remarkable personality. You'll tell me it has seen you through often

enough to show you how far you can go ; and I fully recognise that time has given it those comfortable curves, those generous gradients over which the railroad of social intercourse may be laid at an expense not incompatible with the hope that it will pay. You *can* go a certain length, Mamma, you can achieve certain runs—but you can't make the time you did ! A road may be well kept up, but if you go in for heavy traffic you must lay your account with a smash. Don't therefore, as I say, don't magnify small accidents. Don't cry out about a collision when there has only been a casual bump ! (Laughing, flattering.) *Your* casual bumps, Mamma, certainly oughtn't to bruise !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, rising in stupefaction.

You take advantage, sir, of the absence of the few protectors I possess— !

PAUL, good-humoured, imperturbable.

Only to enjoin upon you not to make too much of such things.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, after an instant.

Of what things, I beg to know, are you indecent enough to speak ?

PAUL.

Why, for instance, of those trashy papers.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Pray, do you take into account their authorship ?

PAUL.

It's just their authorship that makes them mere hyperbole!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, after another moment.

Will you be so good as to tell me what you're talking about?

PAUL, surprised.

The letters you sent the Captain for.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

What's your reason for calling them letters?

PAUL, checked, embarrassed.

I don't insist on the name. Outbursts of momentary ardour.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, very alert.

Then *I* insist on the name!—What abyss have you unguardedly opened?

PAUL, after an instant.

What are the papers you are to go over with the Captain?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Instructions from the late Mr. Doubleday—drawn up in view of the contingency which has now presented itself.

PAUL.

That of your chucking up his son?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

That of *your* "chucking up" his widow!

PAUL, amused.

Something seems to tell me the instructions are voluminous!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I've every confidence. But it's a mystery I've always respected. The large red seals are intact.

PAUL.

And you propose to delegate to the Captain the office of breaking them?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

After first assuring myself that he is really worthy of it. (Then after an instant, abrupt, distressfully appealing, with a complete change of tone and manner.) Paul—*is* he really worthy?

PAUL, laughing.

Doesn't it strike you I'm an extraordinary person to ask?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

You're the person who knows most about such things.

PAUL.

Let me inquire in turn what things you're talking about.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

The horrible things men do. You've betrayed him—and he has betrayed himself.

PAUL.

I've never betrayed anybody, and I can promise you I never will! We'll respect the mystery of the late Mr.

Doubleday's instructions—we'll keep our hands from the large red seals.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

You practically proclaim, then, that the Captain's are impure? (With another outburst of entreaty.) Paul, who *is* the woman to whom he has been writing? (Then as PAUL throws up his arms in embarrassed repudiation.) I'll draw you a cheque for half the amount of your bills.

PAUL.

Thirty-five pounds?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

Four and ninepence ha'penny—if you'll tell me the truth.

PAUL, thinking.

The real truth?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, ardent.

The whole truth!

PAUL, after another moment.

Not for the money!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, indignant, flouncing off.

I'll get it from *him*!

Exit MRS. DOUBLEDAY to the hall.

PAUL, alone, disconcerted.

She'll break with him! (Then, alarmed, as Mr. BONSOR reappears: re-enter Mr. BONSOR by the lower door on the right.) Mr. Bonsor, *will* she break with him?

MR. BONSOR.

My ungovernable niece? I'm sorry to have to recognise that she has already practically done so. She has levelled against my young friend an accusation under the effect of which I have fairly staggered from her presence—an accusation of conduct—

PAUL, as he can't bring it out.

Unparliamentary? What has he done?

MR. BONSOR.

I am just looking for him to inquire. (Then as he sees CHANTER: re-enter Captain CHANTER from the garden.) Have you seen the member for Blackport?

CHANTER.

He's in the garden. (Agitated, blanched, to PAUL as Mr. BONSOR goes up.) I can't *do* it!

PAUL.

She hasn't got them!

Re-enter Mrs. DOUBLEDAY from the hall.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, with a large sealed packet and with energy, as CHANTER moves quickly away from PAUL and she sees Mr. BONSOR going.

Mr. Bonsor! (Then as he obediently comes down with her.) Be present! That's more, apparently, than Captain Chanter had courage to be!

PAUL.

Dear Mamma, he has come back for you.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

I've come back for *him* ! (Then having looked hard from one of them to the other ; holding out her packet to CHANTER.) Break those seals ! (To Mr. BONSOR.) The instructions.

MR. BONSOR.

A new lot ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

For the new crisis. The supreme measures.

MR. BONSOR, complacent.

Our second line of defence !

PAUL.

Abandon, Captain, your second line. We'll dispense with the supreme measures. (Then as CHANTER stares.) Touch the seals at your peril. Give *me* the packet.

CHANTER, with his packet ; tormented, perplexed, to Mrs. DOUBLEDAY.
What will be the penalty, love, of my surrendering my precious charge ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

The inevitable inference that you have reasons for grovelling before your pupil. (After an instant ; formidable.) He has seen the fatal letters.

MR. BONSOR, blank but prompt.

Where are they to be seen ?

MRS. DOUBLEDAY.

That's exactly what I want to know! Paul doesn't deny the impeachment.

CHANTER, scandalised, tossing his packet to a table.

Then I call upon him instantly to do so. (To PAUL.)
What letters does your mother mean?

PAUL, after a moment.

I let the cat out of the bag! (Then as PITT BRUNT reappears.)
The fatal letters exist!

Re-enter PITT BRUNT from the garden.

PITT BRUNT, struck, coming quickly down as BLANCHE reappears.
The fatal letters exist!

Re-enter BLANCHE AMBER by the lower door on the right.

CHANTER, amazed, to PITT BRUNT.

How the devil, sir, do *you* know?

PITT BRUNT, arrested, conciliatory.

I hasten to explain, sir, that I don't attribute them to *you*!

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, astonished.

Then to whom in the world do you attribute them?

BLANCHE, precipitate, very loud.

Ahem!

PAUL, while the others stare in surprise at her ambiguous ejaculation.
I'll save Mr. Brunt the trouble of saying. (After a moment.)
The fatal letters are mine !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, blank.
Then who in the world *has* them ?

BLANCHE, passing close to PITT BRUNT ; privately, with ferocity.
Say at your peril !

PAUL, to Mrs. DOUBLEDAY.
I thought they had come into your hands. (Then indicating
CHANTER.) Take him away to beg his pardon.

CHANTER, to Mrs. DOUBLEDAY, smiling.
Naughty doubting dear !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, breathing again, but severe.
Naughty frightening man !

PAUL, impatient ; motioning them off.
Oh, make it up somewhere else !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, startled, giving ground, but hesitating.
Without the instructions ?

PAUL.
You evidently require no teaching ! (Then highly authoritative.)
Go !

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, who has hurried up; to CHANTER, at the door
to the hall.

Come !

Exit Mrs. DOUBLEDAY.

CHANTER, uneasy ; privately to PAUL.

But the letters ?

PAUL.

I'll find them !

CHANTER, up at the door to the hall ; aloud.

Reprobate !

Exit Captain CHANTER.

PAUL, at the left ; peremptory, to Mr. BONSOR and PITT BRUNT, who have
been conversing down at the right.

Leave me alone with Miss Amber !

BLANCHE.

I require to be alone with Mr. Paul.

MR. BONSOR.

You will neither of you have forgotten that *I* wish to be
alone—

PAUL.

With the member for Blackport ? So do *I* ! But I'll
take him later.

PITT BRUNT.

I shall suffer nothing to blind me to the fact that I have
still my hour to put in.

MR. BONSOR.

On the water? You can take me out—I'll join you directly in the garden. (Then to PAUL, while PITT BRUNT, intensely preoccupied, approaches BLANCHE.) Reprobate!

Exit Mr. BONSOR to the hall.

PITT BRUNT, to BLANCHE.

You accept the shocking evidence?

BLANCHE.

Of an existing connection?—I accept everything!

PITT BRUNT, up at the window, scandalised.

I call it immorality!

Exit PITT BRUNT to the garden.

BLANCHE, to PAUL.

I daresay it is; but I forgive you.

PAUL, vague.

For saying such a thing?

BLANCHE.

For doing it! I have the letters!

PAUL, amazed.

How in the world—?

BLANCHE.

In my room—from Mr. Brunt.

PAUL, bewildered.

How did Mr. Brunt get them?

BLANCHE.

I give it up! But I'm keeping them for you.

PAUL, anxious.

Don't "keep" them—bring them to me! (Then checking her as she is going.) But there's something you *can* keep for me. (Placing in her hands the sealed packet.) Keep this!

BLANCHE, with the packet, exalted, at the lower door on the right.

To the death!

Exit BLANCHE AMBER. Re-enter Mrs. FRESHVILLE from the hall.

PAUL, nervous, curt.

I've been too busy to come back to you—and I'm too busy to converse with you now!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You're a very superior person, Dud; but you can be awfully nasty when you like. You know I've declined to leave the house without that memento—doubly dear to me now—of our brighter and happier hours. Your precious photo has been appropriated, and after very patiently and very vainly waiting there for you to recover it for me, I demand here the production of my property.

PAUL.

Accept as a substitute, my dear Nina, the assurance that I'll be taken again!

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

What I desire, Dudley, is the representation of your more juvenile and—since you force me to say so—your more attractive personality.

PAUL, alarmed, as PITT BRUNT reappears.

Don't bring it up—there's some one there !

Re-enter PITT BRUNT from the garden.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

You gave her the letters ?

PITT BRUNT, embarrassed.

She has them in her hands.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

And what does she say about the shocking evidence—

PITT BRUNT.

Of an existing connection ? She accepts it. She accepts everything !

MRS. FRESHVILLE, stupefied.

Everything ? Then she's a cat !

PITT BRUNT, emphatic.

She's a cat !

PAUL, smiling.

No—she's only a woman in love ! (To PITT BRUNT, who stands blank.) Have you come back for something ?

PITT BRUNT.

For Mr. Bonsor—to put in my hour.

PAUL.

I daresay he's dressing. (Then with a happy thought; inspired.)
Put it in with Mrs. Freshville!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, struck.

On the river—the dear old river?

PITT BRUNT, struck.

I put in an hour each day. (After an instant, engaging.) *Could*
you give me as much as that?

MRS. FRESHVILLE, looking from PITT BRUNT to PAUL.

By-bye?

PAUL.

By-bye!

MRS. FRESHVILLE, giving her reticule to PITT BRUNT.

Stick it in the boat.

PITT BRUNT, alert, with the reticule; up at the window, to PAUL.

Patch it up with Mr. Bonsor!

Exit PITT BRUNT to the garden.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, after a moment; thoughtful.

Not engaged?

PAUL.

I can answer for that!

THE REPROBATE

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

Much of a swell?

PAUL, handing her from the table the copy of the "society-paper."
The papers are full of him.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, with the cartoon.

"The Idol of the North"!

PAUL.

The young man of the hour.

MRS. FRESHVILLE.

More than ever *you* were! By-bye.

PAUL.

By-bye.

MRS. FRESHVILLE, with the copy of the paper under her arm; up
at the window, contemptuous, sarcastic.

Perfection!

Exit Mrs. FRESHVILLE to the garden

Re-enter Captain CHANTER from the hall.

CHANTER, anxious.

Has she gone?

PAUL, coming down from the window, indicating the garden, while CHANTER,
interrogative, goes up, and BLANCHE and Mr. BONSOR reappear.

She has found an opening!

Re-enter BLANCHE AMBER by the lower door on the right. Re-enter Mr.
BONSOR, in boating costume, from the hall.

BLANCHE, with Mrs. FRESHVILLE's letters, eager, to PAUL.

Here are the letters !

CHANTER, struck, turning, bounding down to grab them.

Mine !

PAUL, smiling, having seized them first.

Mine !

CHANTER, to BLANCHE, resentful.

You should have given them to *me* !

BLANCHE.

They belong to the writer.

CHANTER.

He's *not* the writer !

BLANCHE, aghast, to PAUL.

You're not the writer ?

PAUL.

I blush to confess it—I'm so much less bad than you
want me !

CHANTER.

He took them on himself to save his friend.

BLANCHE, struck, eager.

He told a glorious lie ?

PAUL, laughing, while he tosses CHANTER the packet of letters.

Don't mention it !

BLANCHE, overjoyed.

But I don't want you any worse than *that*!

MR. BONSOR, to CHANTER.

Are you very sure his friend is saved?

PAUL.

Not if you basely blab, Mr. Bonsor.

CHANTER, confident, complacent.

Oh, he may basely blab! (After an instant.) I'm sure!

MR. BONSOR, to BLANCHE.

But where did *you* get them?

BLANCHE.

From the member for Blackport.

MR. BONSOR, blank.

And where did *he* get them?

PAUL.

From the lady to whom they were addressed.

MR. BONSOR, startled.

Nina—the unspeakable Nina? (Indignant.) He never went near her!

PAUL.

He's remarkably near her now—he's out on the river with her!

MR. BONSOR, stupefied.

Then it was for *him* the woman came?

PAUL.

She came for a certain photograph!

MR. BONSOR, struck.

I remember! (Looking ineffectually round.) What on earth became of it?

BLANCHE, producing it from her pocket.

Here it is!

MR. BONSOR, to the others, amazed.

She had it all the while?

BLANCHE, embarrassed, hesitating.

I took it because—because—

PAUL, radiant.

You must keep the reason for *me*!

BLANCHE.

May I tell him, uncle?

MR. BONSOR.

Tell him what you like! (Then looking at her a moment in bewildered abstraction, raising and dropping his arms at his sides in helpless and humiliated renunciation and going up.) The Idol of the North!

PAUL, ardent, triumphant, with his two hands out.

Blanche!

BLANCHE, meeting him in happy freedom while he takes both her hands and respectfully kisses them.

Paul !

Re-enter Mrs. DOUBLEDAY from the hall.

MRS. DOUBLEDAY, startled, instinctive, loud, as before.

Paul !

CHANTER, eager, as the others, absorbed, pay-no attention.

It's all right ! (Then, irresistible, as Mrs. DOUBLEDAY surrenders herself to his endearment.) Beloved !

PAUL, suddenly observing, good-naturedly but loudly and ominously warning, while Mrs. DOUBLEDAY gives a violent start.

Mamma !

THE END

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